

BHAGAT SINGH

The Eternal Rebel

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*Dedicated to
the memory of Bhagwati Bhai
and Durga Bhabi*

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My foremost gratitude to the Martyr's mother, for her blessings, and for her narration of accounts regarding numerous revolutionaries whom she had played host from time to time, when I met and stayed with her during May 1963 at Khatkar Kalan, courtesy my student Jagmohan, her grand son, a privilege I continued to enjoy till her sad demise in June 1975.

I am no less beholden to Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna, the founder president of *Ghadr* party, who shared with us—myself, Jagmohan, and Rajinder, my nephew and many others—his rich treasure of experiences and insight while making us feel as if we were his peers, for more than 3 years before he left us for ever in December 1968. We followed it up by meeting other *Ghadrites*, who were no less generous, indulgent to us all, and we owe a lot to their patronage.

Inspired by these 'living martyrs' we, a few young men, undertook a campaign of disseminating the rich legacy of our Martyrs through pamphlets, leaflets, posters, exhibiting their photographs while celebrating their anniversaries in schools, colleges, villages during the late sixties and early seventies under the aegis of Youth Centre / *Yuvak Kendra*, Jalandhar, a highly rewarding experience for us all.

I got a golden opportunity to delve deep into the life accounts of some of the veteran *Ghadrites* while translating, editing and publishing autobiographies of Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna, Baba Hari Singh Usman, Sant Baba Wasakha Singh Dadehar and Baba Ram Saran Das, a unique experience for me, for which I do not find appropriate words to thank them.

I thank dear Jagmohan for introducing me to eminent revolutionaries like Shiv Verma, Jai Dev Kapoor and Kiron Das.

To Kiron Dada I owe a great obligation for having gone all out to introduce me to a number of revolutionaries of Bengal at Kolkata in December 1969, of whom four, including legendary Bina Das stayed with us during their visit to Punjab in March 1970.

My respectful regards to the revolutionary novelist of the revolutionaries Gyani Kesar Singh – Canada and the dedicated and tireless historian of revolutionary movements Bhai Nahar Singh, both of whom were my guides- friends. I treasure each moment of my association with them for my learning and enjoyment and find it really hard to convey my thanks in words.

I am indebted to my co-authors for their spirit of self-denial: Prof. Harinder Singh, Dr Kuldip Puri, Dr Gurdev Singh Sidhu, Rajwanti Mann, Madhvi Kataria, Sita Ram Bansal, Sangram Singh and Harish Jain, who is also my generous publisher besides Dear Ramesh Kumar for his logistic support.

I have relied on writings and statements of following personalities which constitute core of this book; Ajit Singh, Yash Pal, Shachindra Sanyal, Shiv Varma, Jai Dev Kapoor, Baba Ram Saran Das, Comrade Ram Chandra, Raja Ram Shastri, Jatindra Sanyal, Kali Charan Ghosh, Vishvanath Vaishampayan, Ajoy Ghosh, Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna, Kiron Das, Bejoy Kumar Sinha, A.G. Noorani, K.C. Yadav & Babar Singh, Davinder Daman, Dr. G.S. Deol, Bhupinder Ahuja, Verinder Sandhu and Jagmohan Singh, I am beholden to them all.

LIFE JOURNEY

1. Birth Saturday, 28th Sept. 1907, 8.45 A.M.
(Vill. Banga, Chak 105, Lyallpur)
2. Primay School 1911-12 to 1916-17
(Vill. Banga, Lyallpur)
3. High School 1917-1921 (upto 9th Class)
(D.A.V. High School, Lahore)
4. College: National College,
Lahore 1921-1923
5. Left Home: August/Sept. 1923 for 6 month;
was at Delhi-Kanpur
6. Joined H.R.A. 1923-24
7. First Warrants of Arrest April 1924 (*Langar* –
Jaito Morcha)
8. Warrants Withdrawn..... December 1925;
(...was at Delhi-Kanpur etc.)
9. Formation of
Naujwan Bharat Sabha March 1926
10. First Arrest:
Dussehra Bomb Case 29th May 1927 to 4th July 1927
11. On Bail 4th July 1927 to January 1928
12. Delhi Meeting (H.S.R.A.) ... 8-9 September 1928
13. Cut Hair Mid September 1928
(at Ferozepur)
14. Visits (Betiah-Bihar) End: September 1928
15. Saunder's Murder (Lahore) . 17th December 1928
16. Escape from Lahore
to Calcutta 20th December 1928
17. Agra Centre January-March 1929
18. Bomb Experiment at Jhansi ... 5th- 6th March 1929
19. Photograph wearing hat 3rd April 1929

20. Assembly Bomb Explosions
and Arrest 8th April 1929
 21. Written Statement in
Delhi Court 6th June 1929
 22. Judgement:
Transportation for Life 12th June 1929
 23. Arrival Mianwali Jail 15-16 June 1929
 24. Started Hunger Strike 15-16 June 1929
 25. Trial in Lahore Conspiracy
Case, Special Magistrate's
Court, Central Jail, Lahore
– starts 10th July 1929
 26. Martyrdom of Jatin Das 13th September 1929
 27. Trial Before Special
Tribunal – starts 5th May 1930
 28. Martyrdom of
Bhagwati Charan Vohra 28th May 1930
 29. Charges Framed by Tribunal ... 10th July 1930
 30. Judgement pronounced 7th October 1930
 31. Date fixed for Execution 27th October 1930
 32. Appeal to Privy Council:
(a) Filed October 1930
(b) Dismissed 12th February 1931
 33. Martyrdom of
Chandra Shekhar Azad 27th February 1931
 34. Final Decision of Hanging ... 17th –18th March 1931
 35. Secret Hanging 23rd March 1931 (evening)
 36. Made known 24th March 1931 (early morning)
-

PROLOGUE



A young Sikh boy, just on the verge of adolescence, sporting a loosely tied turban, wearing a crumpled shirt and *pyjamas*, stared at the stinking, blood-soaked open space with tell-tale signs of inhuman massacre that had taken place there just the previous day. He had a distant, forlorn and a deeply thoughtful look in his eyes. From the pocket of his *pyjamas*, he took out a small glass bottle which he had brought to carry the blood-soaked soil back with him. He tried digging, but the soil had hardened, despite the fact the crust was somewhat moist with blood of hundreds of innocent people. He picked up a sharp-edged brick and dug out the soil. Having filled the bottle, he stared at it. His eyes welled up with unshed tears. With unsure steps, he left the spot.

That morning, the young Sikh boy, Bhagat Singh, had left his home near Lahore for school, but instead of going to attend his classes in D.A.V. School, he headed for the railway station and boarded the first available train to Amritsar. He had heard about the horrifying massacre of the 13th of April that took place at *Jallianwala Bagh*. Hundreds of Lahorites who were in Amritsar on the fateful *Baisakhi* day came back with bone-chilling accounts of the killing of innocent people in cold-blood. That night he could not sleep. The spectre of the blood bath at Amritsar haunted him throughout the night. He was restless. The scenario was dark and the echoed with the cries of the hapless victims. What drove him to carry the glass container to bring back the blood soaked soil, is difficult to guess. Perhaps it was something that was sacred to him and that he needed the soil as a painful reminder of the killing of

innocent people — the pain that had to be avenged!



He had little difficulty in finding his way to the spot, which had been the venue of many public meetings, where he frequently accompanied his father to attend various conferences, particularly since 1917 when Sardar Kishan Singh had shifted to village 'Khawasrian' on the outskirts of Lahore and set up a farm and dairy there in order to be close to Lahore — the hub of political activities those days. Bhagat Singh often travelled alone from Lahore to the village Banga, Lyallpur, during holidays, when he was in the school hostel.

Upon his return to the house late evening, Bhagat's younger sister ran out to meet him. Indeed the family was worried since the boy had not returned as per his normal routine. An uneasy calm, uncertainty and ominous forebodings hung heavy in the air. His sister had fondly kept aside his share of fruit. The moment her brother entered the house, she rushed in to offer it to him, but instantly she realized that her brother was sad and forlorn. "I cannot eat anything," Bhagat Singh said, "Let me show you something." And he took out the glass container filled with the blood soaked soil. "The Englishmen have slaughtered so many of our brethren." He narrated the horrifying saga, plucked some flower petals and placed them reverentially around the container. This ritual continued for many days.

The young boy had grown up overnight: He had lost his childlike innocence and his carefree adolescence yielded to unexpected maturity.

Historically, the massacre of Jallianwala Bagh is a watershed in our struggle for freedom. It also proved to be a turning point in the life of young Bhagat Singh. A fire started simmering inside him and he became a committed soldier ready to dedicate his life for the freedom of his beloved country. That he did.

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THE ROOTS

According to Sardar Ajit Singh, uncle of Bhagat Singh, their earliest known ancestors belonged to village Narli near Amritsar. One of them opted to settle in village **Khatkar Kalan** near



Jalandhar, during the days of Mughal Rule. Narli village lies in the heart of the belt mostly populated by Sandhu-Jats, the sub-caste of the family. What occasioned this migration is a story of some interest which has been fondly narrated by Ajit Singh in his memoirs. He has portrayed the episode quite graphically:

Their enterprising ancestor who made this, not so easy a choice, was sent by the family to immerse the last remains of a demised kin, at Haridwar in holy Ganges. The distance had to be traversed on foot, the only mode prevalent at that time. Since the travel involved a number of weeks, one had to make halts at night on the way at some places. Being a total stranger, the traveller had to scout a family willing to

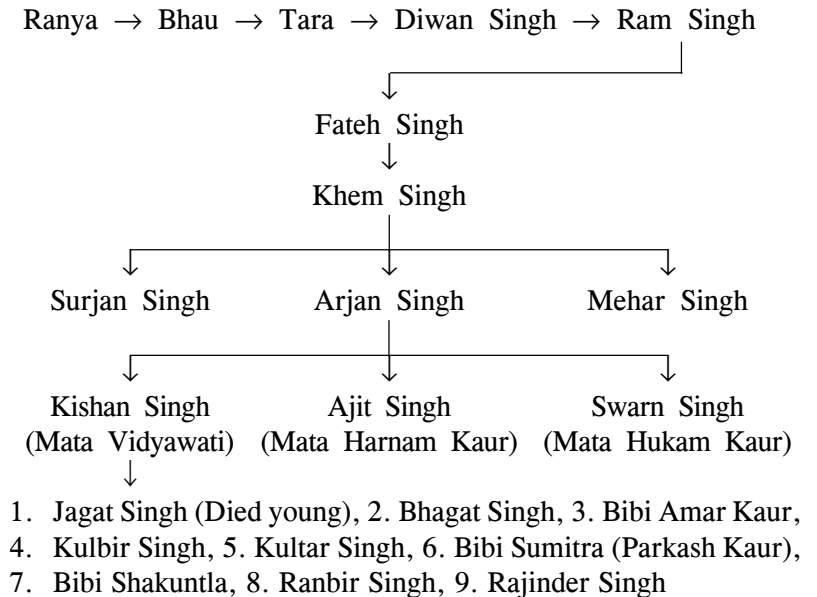
play host in a place being visited by him for the first time in his life. The choice often fell on some well-to-do family enjoying a reputation for hospitality. This is what happened, when this traveller was guided to the fortress-like residence of the village *Sardar*.

Welcomed by the host, the body-language of the stranger held some charm for the former. Having stayed overnight, the guest left the house early next morning after taking leave from the host family. But the parting was with a proviso; the guest was asked to make a halt on his return journey also. As it transpired, the host family had only one issue, a daughter, and they were on the lookout for a live-in son-in-law to inherit the family estate. Though this proposal was not broached with the stranger in so many words, yet some hint was given to him that such a proposal was in the offing. This impelled him to traverse back from Haridwar somewhat earlier than scheduled.

Whatever be the complexion of his rosy dreams, he could not have, in his wildest imagination, conjectured that this union shall make history as it did! The proposal was a package: It implied his uprooting from his ancestral land and the kin. The decision must have been tough for the young man. Besides, there was an in-built inhibition regarding the notion of being a live-in son-in-law. But then the prospective in-laws of the young man had made it explicit that upon marriage, he would be enjoying the status of the owner of the fortress, estate, whose title he shall hold after marriage. And so it happened.¹

In the absence of adequate information about family lineage, we have to descend straight to the period of Sikh rule in Punjab, under Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839). Sardar Fateh Singh, the contemporary ancestor of the family had held a high-profile post in Sikh Army. He showed his patriotic mettle by declining the tempting offers made by the colonial British successors to serve in their occupation army, an offer quite alluring, having already won over a number of the former *Sardars* of Maharaja's Army. Nay, it entailed not merely a sacrifice of status and estate, willy nilly, it also listed him among the 'undesirables'.

THE FAMILY



The Grand Parents

Sardar Arjan Singh, Bhagat Singh's grand father; born soon after



the suppression of the uprising of 1857, grew up in an atmosphere full of intense contradictions wherein the forces of liberation and oppression, were re-inventing themselves for a long drawn out struggle for supremacy. The rulers, having bitter experience of Indian revolt once, were so scared that they would shudder at the slightest hint of dissent. They started on the path of sowing dissension, the proverbial divide and rule, ensuing loyalty of the feudal vested interests. Their pretence of civilizing the backward races of the Orient, so called 'Whiteman's burden', which meant eradication of evil customs such as 'Sati', was also given a go by. In a total reversal of this policy, refuge was sought in the dissemination of myths sanctifying their rule. For this, they found willing instruments in the priesthood who were able to 'discover' and cite from so-called scriptures excerpts to show as if this was pre-ordained. For instance in

Punjab, a high profile Sikh scholar was roped in to narrate it in his pseudo-historical narrative, an episode purportedly depicting the imprisonment of Guru Tegh Bahadur, the Ninth Sikh Guru by Aurangzeb at Delhi Kotwali, wherein the Guru had predicted the onset of future rulers of India from Europe. Then going much beyond, a legend was propounded that Guru Gobind Singh, his successor-son had told Rajput chiefs Madan Singh and Sham Singh that Sikhs would dominate the world by joining the forces of British Empire under their flag.

These remarks have been excerpted from a periodical “The Khalsa Advocate”, deemed to be the mouthpiece of ‘enlightened Sikh gentry’ in its editorials vide its issues dated 26th June and 18 Sept. 1915. The editors had stooped so low as to welcome the brutal treatment meted out to *Komagata Maru* passengers who were brutally fired upon at Budge Budge Ghat, Calcutta on 29th September 1914, and had also eulogised the Special Tribunal 1915 for having sentenced 24 Ghadrists to death ‘which they richly reserved’.²

As for the common people, in the absence of any secular tradition of popular rule, they too had to fall back upon their religious moorings to reorganize the forces of dissent. In a way, it may have meant a kind of regression, but in the absence of a forward looking world-view, this was the only choice. It was more or less in this scenario that persons like Swami Dayanand appeared on the scene in the nineteenth century with a mission to restore the glory of *Vedas* and revival of their message by launching a renaissance like movement under the aegis of Arya Samaj. Whatever be its spiritual impact, what alarmed the alien rulers was the revival of feelings of self-esteem among the Indians based on the inherent worth of their heritage.

In the given context, Arya Samaj movement had a direct bearing on the incubation of nationalist-patriotic proclivities in Bhagat Singh’s family through the person of Sardar Arjan Singh who, having personally attended some of the discourses of Swami Dayanand, was among his early followers in Punjab. According to family historian Verinder, “he did so at a time when one had to traverse a long distance to move from a *Mandir* to *Arya Samaj Bhawan* whence he (Sardar Arjan Singh) moved to *Bhawan* from a *Gurdwara*.” According to her, it was nothing short of a ‘revolutionary step’. Besides its political long-term implications, the short term implication was his decision to put both his elder sons Kishan Singh and Ajit Singh in the Sain Das Anglo-Sanskrit High School of Jalandhar, an unprecedented decision for a Jat-Sikh. He, himself

took up the job of a *Munshi* to Raizada Bhagat Ram, a pleader at Jalandhar, an association which had a political dimension too since his employer was an active Congress worker. It was not therefore fortuitous that Arjan Singh’s leaning towards Arya Samaj paralleled his active association with Congress. He, along with his elder brother Surjan Singh, who was a *Zaildar*, an office reserved for the loyalists of the Empire, attended the Congress Session in 1893 at Lahore, held under the presidency of Dadabhai Naoroji, in the capacity of delegates from Jalandhar district: Their grand-grand daughter Verinder has drawn an interesting word picture of the two brothers carrying flags, dressed in their native attires. When the train carrying the Congress President and other delegates reached Jalandhar railway station, Raizada Bhagat Ram introduced the duo to him. All the other delegates being in western dress, these two were a study in contrast. Dadabhai Naoroji felt so charmed that he accommodated them in his own compartment. This far, both the brothers were co-farers in the path of public life. However, this was not to last long. Soon after, the epidemic of plague polarized the two, the elder brother openly supporting the official policy of demolishing the houses of suspected plague-affected families, without offering them any compensation, which was vehemently opposed by the younger brother. The duo failed to meet ever afterwards in the domain of public life.

“Sardar Arjan Singh’s lifestyle is quite significant since Bhagat Singh (and Jagat Singh too, till he survived) had their grand-father, as their mentor and companion since their father Sardar Kishan Singh, as also their uncle Sardar Ajit Singh were always away from home being actively involved with some meeting or movement.

“Arjan Singh had two strong traits in his personality”, according to Verinder, “both equally vibrant — perseverance and an insatiable urge for social reform. By disposition, he was inimical to *status-quo* and a votary of reform. Both the qualities being complementary, resulted in an incessant striving for reform and progress. He, by his self-efforts, had acquired good command over as many as five languages — Hindi, Sanskrit, Urdu, Persian and Gurmukhi/Punjabi. He also acquired the skill of ‘Unani’ system of medicine which he practiced with a fair amount of professional competence.

“In due course of time, his sense of adventure prompted him to accept the offer of colonial government to allot him 25 Acres of land in canal colony in village Banga, District Lyallpur, in 1898. This place was destined to be the birthplace of the Martyr and his other siblings,

where they spent their childhood and had their initial schooling.

“The virgin land here had much potential but it required intensive sustained efforts. By now, he would have expected his two elder sons, who were now in the prime of their youth, to bear the brunt of this ordeal. But it was not to be so since it was he, himself, their parent and their mentor, who had infused in them the spirit of patriotism, and consequently both his elder sons made themselves scarce as far as farming was concerned. Hence, to be carefree in the old age was not to be his destiny, but then who else than he himself had sown the crop, was ultimately to reap it!”³

As already hinted, Arya Samaj, while being an avowedly religious movement, also had strong social ramifications, often transcending the social to impact the political, to which the rulers were hypersensitive. The author is tempted to reproduce an observation of Judges during the trial of *Ghadrite* revolutionaries in the context of *Koma Gata Maru episode* of 1914 which echoes such an apprehension: “Constitutional agitation (read social reform) may easily drift into intemperate agitation, intemperate agitation into sedition, and sedition into revolutionary methods.”⁴

“In his personal life Sardar Arjan Singh had a passion for manual work. He had himself nurtured a mango orchard in his land. He took active part in construction of a Gurdwara in his village despite his being an Arya Samajist. He was thus, far from being a doctrinaire possibly blazing a trail for Bhagat Singh. In this regard, his open sympathy for Gurdwara reforms and Akali movement was manifested in his sporting a black turban, the symbol of the movement. He openly defied the practice of untouchability, never losing an opportunity to debunk it in his day to day life.

Recalls S. Ajit Singh: “Quite a kid, I was taken along with my elder brother to Anandpur, the holy seat for the performance of Sikh Baptism... Our family, since the days of the Tenth Guru who initiated this ritual, have always taken the male members to Holy Anandpur for this ceremony.” *Ajit Singh — An Exiled revolutionary*, pp. 21-22.

“As for his active participation in political movements, when in 1920 Non-Cooperation Movement was launched, he gave up the flag of ‘Om’ to take up the flag of ‘Bharat Mata ki Jai’: He led a band of *Satyagrahis* to the town of Jaranwala.”

Verinder had also ventured to surmise as to what was the essence of his legacy for the family: According to her, “it was the nurturing of

the fire of revolt, which may come naturally in the days of youth, but he kept it aflame till his last days. For this, he faced the hazards of his first son being perpetually on the run, the second going to exile as early as 1909 and the third, Swarn Singh laying down his life in jail due to his patriotic activities at the young age of 23 soon after his marriage. The epitome of his commitment to the cause of revolt was his offering of two grandsons Jagat Singh and Bhagat Singh to the altar of Bharat Mata, signified by the initiation ritual called ‘*Yagyopavit*’, pronouncing “I dedicate my both these progenies, while standing besides the sacred fire, as sacrifice to the nation.”

“Now a word about **Mata Jai Kaur** — who maintained her faith in Sikhism. At the time of the ‘*Yagyopavit*’, the heads of those to be baptised are clean-shaved: But this, the grand-ma could not brook; the grand-pa did not insist on it.



Grandmother: Jai Kaur

“As per our social set up, the wife is always the silent sufferer. No one can, possibly, fathom the sorrow which Mata Jai Kaur had to bear till she lived while coping with the agony of her two younger daughters-in-law Bibi Harnam Kaur, the spouse of her second son, whose whereabouts or even survival was not certain, and the widow of the youngest son, Bibi Hukam Kaur, all the time pining for her young departed husband.

Above all, the martyrdom of her grown up grandson, of a marriageable age for whom she had woven many dreams, that stood shattered.

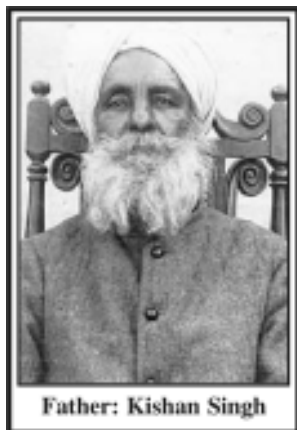
“As a housewife, she used to assist her husband in his medical practice by preparing medicines. She also had acquired the skill of bone-setting. By virtue of her social activities she was elected a member of the village Panchayat. For decades at a stretch, she took care of the galaxy of the underground patriots like Sufi Amba Prashad, the *Ghadrites* and often saved them from the police even at the risk of her life. She survived her valiant husband by eight years and expired in 1940.

“If Arjan Singh was a flag of social revolution, Mata Jai Kaur was the pole of the flag”, are the concluding remarks of Verinder.⁵

Parents

The infancy and early childhood of Bhagat Singh was spent mostly

in the company of his grandfather. From his adolescence onwards he remained more under the care of his father.



Father: Kishan Singh

As a student of Sain Das Anglo Sanskrit High School, Jalandhar, **Sardar Kishan Singh**, father of Bhagat Singh, got associated with Mahatma Hans Raj. This phase of his life can be said to be that of social service. But the intensity and scope of his social service was immense and diverse. It encompassed organizing of relief camps in the areas of famine in such far off places as M.P. and Gujarat in 1897, after the quake in Kangra in 1904 and during floods in 1905 in the river Jehlum in Kashmir.

“This enabled him to gain insight into the political scenario of contemporary India. Thus he too gravitated towards Congress, the only national forum available to him. Once in Congress, he became part and parcel of the radical faction, under the leadership of Bal Gangadhar Tilak. The year 1907 found all the three brothers in the whirlpool of political turmoil, caused partly by the partition of Bengal in 1905 and later by the Land Colonisation Act in Punjab which aimed at taking away the ownership rights from the farmers settled in Canal Colonies. Punjab was then in the thick of unrest, Lyallpur — the home district of the family being its hub.

“All the three brothers became victims of government repression: While **Ajit Singh**



Uncle: Swarn Singh

was exiled to Burma (now Myanmar) after his arrest at Amritsar on 3.6.1907, **Swarn Singh** was imprisoned on 20.7.1907 at Lahore and Kishan Singh was arrested

in Nepal on 2.9.1907. But as if by a rare luck, the news of release of all the three brothers virtually synchronized with the birth



Uncle: Ajit Singh

of Bhagat Singh on 28 September 1907. This being an auspicious occasion for the family, the new born was seen as a harbinger of good luck, and was nicknamed ‘Bhaganwala’, the lucky one, later being formally named Bhagat Singh!

“Besides the other personality traits of Sardar Kishan Singh, was shrewdness, a canny ‘sixth sense’ to ward off crises, which stood him in good stead in his rendering vital assistance to revolutionaries of all shades, such as in providing them shelter and protection from arrest, notwithstanding the fact that he himself was always under perpetual police surveillance. To mention a few instances: Rash Bihari Bose after Delhi Bomb Case, Baba Gurdit Singh of the *Komagata Maru* fame, Bhai Parmanand, and other *Ghadrites* of 1914-15; for them all, his house was a safe hideout. In this role, his outward simplicity and a rustic bearing, came handy to him, in putting off many smart C.I.D. people. Once in 1910-11, Sachindra Nath Sanyal came to him accompanied by a youngman named Vibhuti. Kishan Singh declined to talk about politics with Sanyal in his presence, who naturally got annoyed. Later, when they were alone, he told Sanyal that the boy was not trustworthy. As it turned out, Vibhuti became an approver against Sanyal in the Benaras Conspiracy Case.

“His whole-hearted cooperation with revolutionaries of all shades, however, did not imply his endorsement of their policies: As for, himself, he preferred the style of functioning of *Bharat Mata* Society, of which he was an active worker. He preferred to work under a legal cover rather than resort to an open revolt.

“What made him stand out even in the mundane affairs was his knack of making money. He had, as a vocation, taken up the business of insurance in which he was very successful. With the money thus earned, he purchased a big chunk of agricultural land at village Khawsrian near Lahore which became a prime asset of the family besides being the family abode from 1920 to 1947. This place finds mention in all official records of Bhagat Singh. His money making as well as money spending, nay squandering, was both phenomenal. He never purchased goods in retail, always in wholesale!

“On the political front, his most outstanding contribution was to be a member of the team of enlightened persons like his two brothers, Lal Chand ‘*Falak*’, Mehta Nand Kishore and others, who literally flooded Punjab with ‘seditious’ publications. There was a spate of prosecutions in this phase of their activities, mostly ‘fruitless’!

“While in jail, he persistently struggled for the self-respect of political prisoners and had to suffer a lot in fighting for the same. In his disposition towards his children he tried to inculcate in them the spirit of dedication to the nation, while being a doting parent too. This duality of roles manifested itself in his performing apparently contradictory roles during the entire revolutionary life of Bhagat Singh.

“Incidentally, he had also been unanimously elected M.L.A. in 1937 from such a high profile constituency as Amritsar, a tribute to his all round popularity.

“Obviously the most trying period of his life was the days preceding his son’s execution, in particular those just before and following his martyrdom on the evening of 23 March 1931. When on that fateful day, the entire family went for the last meeting, the jail officers refused to allow grandparents and the aunts (*chachis*) of Bhagat Singh to meet him for not being first degree kin. Kishan Singh told them all to wait a bit away from the jail premises and that he would talk to the big boss. He went inside and on return told every one in a matter of fact tone, “It is as per rules”, without betraying any emotion so as not to excite the feelings of the family and to avoid mass reaction since by then there was a big crowd around watching the entire situation with forebodings of impending execution any time. “There were then some signals from the jail that the execution time may be advanced by 12 hours (from morning of 24th to the evening of 23rd). The family, followed by a sizeable crowd, moved away from jail. On reaching Mori Gate, the gathering of people turned into a public meeting. Kishan Singh maintained his calm while addressing the gathering. In the meanwhile, someone whispered to him that the executions had taken place. Even then he did not betray any emotion and continued his speech. Upon reaching the jail gate, he, and all others shouted to get the gate opened. But this was not to be as the three dead bodies had been secretly smuggled out of the jail to be cremated at some undisclosed place.

“To conclude, as a father his greatest gift to Bhagat Singh was to be self-reliant which can be endorsed by an instance: He tasked Bhagat Singh to serve food to a *jatha* of 500 *satyagrahis* of Jaito Gurdwara agitation in the teeth of government hostility besides the active obstruction by their own loyalist kin Dilbagh Singh. Bhagat Singh did full justice to the assignment delivered a speech too, deemed seditious by police resulting in his first warrants of arrest.

“Incidentally, the father often beat Bhagat Singh with a stick

whenever he got annoyed with him. According to Mata Vidyawati, when Bhagat Singh was released after his first arrest in 1927 by the Lahore High Court because of the untiring efforts of his father on a bail bond of near astronomical amount of Rs. 60,000, Bhagat Singh was routinely thrashed by his father. It is stated that while the son was being beaten, he responded just by laughing and saying, “*Bhaeeya ji shanti karo, shanti*” (Papa be calm)! A family servant conveyed this news to the mother in the village farm house. But when Bhagat Singh met his mother, in the evening, on his mother’s enquiry, he simply put her off, joking and laughing at the ‘rumour’.

“Such a multifaceted role of Kishan Singh as a father, as also a mentor of Bhagat Singh, besides being a public figure of a high stature in his own right, had far-reaching implications in the life of the martyr which is not easy to fathom.”⁶



Mother: Vidyawati

Bhagat Singh’s mother, **Vidyawati** was born in 1886 to S. Wariam Singh, a Rai Sikh Jat at Morarwali Village of Hoshiarpur district. She expired on 1 June 1975 and was cremated at Hussainiwala, Ferozepur adjacent to the spot of his son’s cremation.

The role of a mother in the life of a child is a bit more difficult to discern than that of father — being much more subtle though all-pervading.

She was initiated into the family as a bride in 1897 at the very young age of 11. Born in a Sikh family, she was named Inder Kaur and was fondly called **Indo**. Her in-laws being *Arya Samajists*, she was given a new identity, **Vidyawati**: Ironical as it may seem, she was totally unlettered and was so named — the educated! Her father-in-law who was residing at Jalandhar was so particular about her education that he was bent upon arranging her stay in a boarding house at Jalandhar for her education. The child bride became so scared of the proposal that she suffered almost a nervous breakdown. Her mother, in order to rescue her from this predicament arranged a *Sanyasi* tutor from around the village to teach her Hindi and she learnt Punjabi at the village *Gurdwara*.

Ultimately, the family settled at village Banga in District Lyallpur and this became her marital home. This house was more a hideout of absconding rebels like Sufi Amba Prasad than a traditional family

abode, to which she must have got accustomed with the flux of time.

Her first issue, a son, Jagat Singh was born in 1904-05.

Her main worry was the tospy-turvy style of life of the family. Her husband being mostly away, her two sisters-in-law: Harnam Kaur, spouse of Sardar Ajit Singh was gasping in an emotional vacuum, not aware of even the survival of her husband and Hukam Kaur who was a young widow. All this was bound to cloud her vision of life.

In the words of Verinder, “what was struggle for her husband, was a ‘crisis’ for her. Later, when Sardar Kishan Singh had enough money to invest, the family shifted to a small village Khwasrian, on the outskirts of Lahore city, a place which figures as residential address of Bhagat Singh in the official records. The big chunk land purchased here became an agricultural farm as well as a source of side business — a dairy farm.

Sometime during 1923, marriage offers for Bhagat Singh started pouring in. One of these was just about to mature but for the disappearance of Bhagat Singh. He quietly left home, leaving behind a letter at his father’s office at Lahore, without indicating his destination. He had, in fact, gone to Kanpur.

What came as a bolt from the blue was, however, Bhagat Singh’s arrest on 29 May 1927 in connection with Dussehra bomb case dating back to October 1926. Since 8-9 persons had died in the incident, a conviction in the case was sure to earn him a capital sentence. Till that time, the mother had learnt to cope with arrests, abscondence and exiles in the family, but never the prospect of death sentence. Ultimately she heaved a sigh of relief on 4th July, when her husband was able to obtain bail from the Lahore High Court, that too on a bail bond of Rs. 60,000 ! This left a deep scar on her psyche, making her feel insecure, with the net result that every prolonged absence of her son was like a nightmare for her. In the words of her grand daughter Verinder, it was a kind of tussle between mother’s *yearning* and son’s *commitment*

“But then her apprehensions were not just imaginary; on April 8-9, 1929 they got a message from Delhi that Bhagat Singh, along with B.K. Dutt had been arrested in connection with throwing of bombs in Central Assembly. Bhagat Singh, thinking of her mother’s emotional state in the event of her visiting him in jail, cautioned his father not to bring her along when he comes to meet him. Above all, the motherhood in her, underwent unspeakable anguish during the prolonged hunger-strikes of her son. Once while she went to see Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt during their hunger strike in Mianwali jail, when she saw him

being brought to the court on stretchers, she could not help crying.

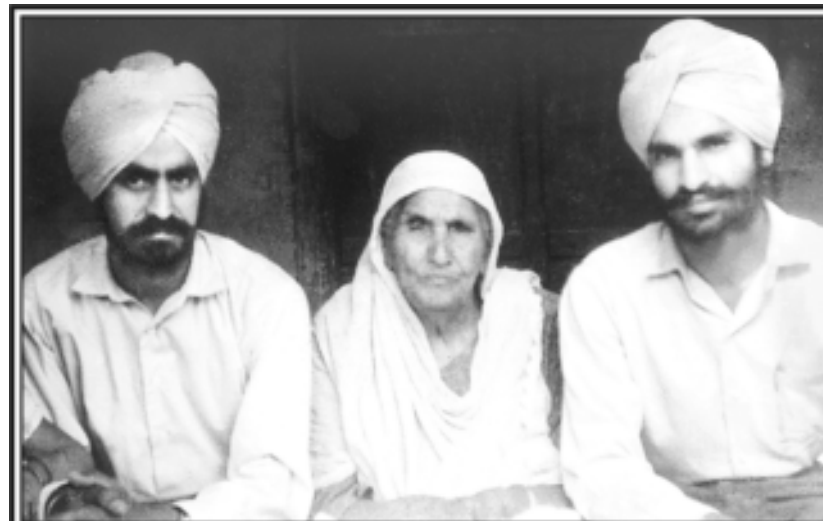
“On one occasion during in a jail meeting, Bhagat Singh ‘suggested’ that she also should come and stay with him. They would, then, have nice time. She retorted, “How can I come? I do not know how to lecture, then should I get arrested by picketing?” Bhagat Singh replied, “You need not do all this.” Pat came her reply, “Should I then hit some one with a *lathi* to get arrested?”

“Her overt participation in public life came much later, i.e. during 1939-40 when her two younger sons Kulbir and Kultar were also put in jail. Sardar Kishan Singh was by then unable to move due to paralysis: She, once presiding over a public meeting near Mori Gate, Lahore, in her earthy language chided the Government for having deprived her one son, two brothers-in-law, and now had stooped so low as to imprison her two younger sons too.

“Came 1947: Post-partition; all her sons went to settle in UP and she was left alone to fend for herself, and to look after her sick husband till he expired in 1951.”⁷

A Personal Note

The author was privileged to be in touch with Mata Vidyawati as also with all other surviving members of the family from 1963 onwards, that is, after three years of his joining Guru Nanak Engineering College, Ludhiana as a lecturer in Humanities whence Jagmohan (now Prof.



From left: Author, mother Vidyawati and Prof. Jagmohan Singh s/o Bibi Amar Kaur

Jagmohan Singh) joined B.E. in Electrical Engineering. He is the son of Bibi Amar Kaur, sister of Bhagat Singh. Our contact resulted in a lifelong friendship, which led to my first visit to Khatkar Kalan to meet 'Bebeji'. Right till her demise, she oftenly stayed with my family besides numerous occasions of personal contact including the days when she was ill. In the treasure of my sterling collections, there is a cassette/CD recording of her interview by Jagmohan. Here are some excerpts, in their English version:

She recollected her son playfully dancing before her and reciting, "Ma! Distribute money to the poor — it would be of no avail otherwise."

"Occasionally, he used to 'confide' in me that he shall bring a charming bride, whom every one would envy."

Jagmohan here interjects, "Then did he do so?"

"Come on, do not be silly," retorts she.

Jagmohan, jokingly suggests, "Did he not bring a bride in the form of freedom?"

"Well, this had never occurred to me, yes!"

Jagmohan then questions her about the last meeting on 3 March 1931.

"All the time he was joking with us. He said, "Bebe you don't come to receive my dead body — you will become unconscious and everyone shall be around you, and would forget me. Send Kulbir Singh instead." Vidyawati said.

She continued this discourse by reiterating her deep conviction that Bhagat Singh always worried and cared for her a lot right from his childhood, contrary to the popular belief, that a life of total dedication to the cause of revolution leaves no space for deep affection and care for one's near and dear ones.

She fondly recalled the attachment, love and care of his father-in-law towards his grandchildren which resulted in all round development of their personalities.

Recalling the early childhood of Bhagat Singh when he had just joined primary school, she said that upon returning from school he would ask his *chachi*, Harnam Kaur 'Any letter from *chacha ji*'. Observing the dejected expression on the face of *chachi*, he would proclaim that upon growing up, he would make the English leave the country and *chacha ji* shall be back.

She also mentioned the care and affection of her son for the needy tenants, being very liberal in presenting gifts to them on occasions like

SHAHEED BHAGAT SINGH'S MOTHER

Sends a

Message to Indian Youth

On Bhagat Singh's arrest a photograph of Shaheed (Martyr) Kartar Singh Sarabha was recovered from him. He always carried this photo in his pocket. Very often Bhagat Singh would show me that photograph and say, "Dear mother, this is my Hero. Friend and Companion." Shaheed Kartar Singh was one of the youngest martyres of 1914—15 Ghadar Movement.

While at home Bhagat Singh used to hum this Panjabi couplet,

*Seva desh di jindriye bari aukhi,
galan karnian dher sukhalian ne.
Jinham desh sewa wich per poya,
unhan lakh musibian jhalian ne.*

(Hard is the path of patriotism, easy enough
uttering of speeches, those who follow, the path of
service to Motherland, have to bear countless
torments.)

Then he would tell that these were the favourite lines of Kartar Singh Sarabha.

Whenever Bhagat Singh came home, he always had his pocket full of books. Often I would mildly pull him up for spoiling his pockets with these books. "What is all this?" I used to ask him. He used to explain with a smile that the books were about martyres and patriots. Some of them were Indians and others hailed from Ireland, Italy and Russia.

My dear children! You, too, should make a deep study of the life and experiences of the patriots. Only then you can find out the correct path of life according to the present circumstances.

My blessings "Become Patriots"—Vidya Wati

YOUTH CENTRE

C/o Smt. Vidyawati, Mother of Shaheed Bhagat Singh
V.& P.O. Khatkar Kalan; Distt. Jullundur (Panjab)

Diwali and Lohri.

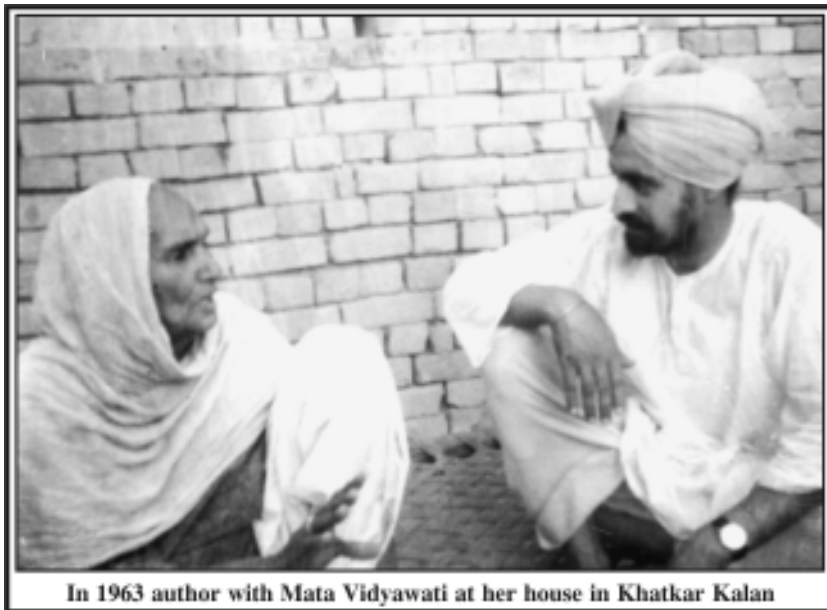
She vividly recollected numerous occasions when her son would show to her the photo of Kartar Singh Sarabha while fondly narrating his exploits.

Finally, what struck me was the contrast between her relative composure while talking about Bhagat Singh, vis-a-vis her overwhelming feeling of grief while talking about the demise of B.K. Dutt, which she perceived as being a fresh wound.

She loved to see the statue of his son along with those of his companions, since according to her, her son could not brook to be away from them even for an instant and felt disappointed to find her son 'alone' at Khatkar Kalan and was elated to see the trio in unison, subsequently at Ludhiana.⁸

Importantly, she seldom failed to recognise those whom she had

the chance to meet upon meeting them later, often telling a person like this writer that, ‘your *chela* who came with you once, had come to me again along with his mother!’ ...so on and so forth....



In 1963 author with Mata Vidyawati at her house in Khatkar Kalan

References:

- 1 *Ajit Singh — An Exiled Revolutionary*, (Ed.) K.L. Johar, Babar Singh Sneh Prakashan, Yamuna Nagar (Haryana), 2004, pp. 12-14.
- 2 *Komagata Maru: Not Just a Voyage*, Malwinder Jit Singh Waraich and Gurdev Singh Sidhu, National Book Trust, India (under publication), pp. 107-114.
- 3 *Yugdrishta Bhagat Singh*: (Hindi), Verinder, Rajpal & Sons, Delhi, 1997, p.15-18.
- 4 *Ghadr Movement Original Documents: Judgements*, Vol. III, Malwinder Jit Singh Waraich and Harish Jain, Unistar Publishers, Chandigarh 2012, p.18.
- 5 Verinder, *op. cit.*, p.20-25.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p.26-49.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p.50-67.
- 8 Original audio-cassette/CD preserved.

2

SCHOOL AND COLLEGE DAYS

Under the care of his grandpa and in the companionship of his



Chachi: Harnam Kaur
W/o S. Ajit Singh

elder brother Jagat Singh, Bhagat Singh joined District Board Primary School in his village. From his early childhood, he wanted to do something beyond the mundane. His two aunts, who were themselves issueless, doted on him. Back from school, he would ask in all innocence, whether **Chachi Harnam Kaur** had got a letter from *Chacha ji*, little knowing that this question would stir in her a volcano of emotions since the fate of her husband Sardar Ajit Singh hanged by a feeble thread for the best part of her life. Not able to reply, the dejected

expression on the face of the *Chachi* would incite him to assert that once grown up, he shall take up a gun and fight against the foreign rulers to make India a free country, and thus secure the return of his *Chacha*.

This obsession of Bhagat Singh with his *Chacha* never left him: In a letter to his friend Amar Chand in 1927, who was then in USA he made anxious inquiries from him in this regard. (For text of the letter, please see Chapter 6: First Arrest)

According to his niece, Verinder, “he had a knack for striking bonds of friendship with almost every boy of his age, both within and outside the school. But more significant was the ease with which he became friends with persons much older than him, for instance, the old tailor in the village. One of his questions to all his fellow students used to be as to what they wanted to become in life: Boys would mention government job, farming or shop-keeping. But when some one said that he would marry, Bhagat Singh was always prompt to retort “Is getting married an achievement? I shall never get married.

I shall throw out the English from our country.”¹ Interestingly, by that time he had started perusing the political literature available in plenty in the house. Indeed, the house was a publishing-cum-distribution centre of patriotic literature. These pamphlets and leaflets were scripted for the semi-literate segment of the people. This made young boys also understand the purport of such writings.

That way the entire atmosphere in the house resonated by the visits, stay and discussions among the most radical mainly *Ghadrites*. It was quite probable that Bhagat Singh’s idol Kartar Singh Sarabha, the young hero of the *Ghadr* party, too could have paid a visit here. Since the actual identities of revolutionaries were never revealed except to the select few, nothing can be said with certainty, but Sardar Kishan Singh is on record to have contributed a sum of Rs. 1,000 to the *Ghadr* party, a princely sum in those times. This fact finds a pointed mention in the judgment of the Special Tribunal which tried the *Ghadrites* of 1914-15.²

“Having passed his primary classes in 1916-17, Bhagat Singh shifted to the Lahore residence of his father in Nawankot locality. He was got admitted to D.A.V. High School, Lahore, a departure from the practice of Sikh boys usually preferring Khalsa schools.”

Of special interest here are his letters to his grandpa and his *Chachi* Hukam Kaur, wife of Sardar Swarn Singh.

His first letter on record is of July 1919 written to his grandpa who was at that time in his ancestral village Khatkar Kalan. It is in Urdu, which then used to be the first language in all government and semi-government schools.

Om

Lahore, dated 27.07.1919

Revered Dada ji,

Submitted that all is well here and pray for your well being from Shri Narayan.

In our quarterly examination which had started in July, many students have failed in Mathematics. Hence our re-examination in the subject would be held on 9th August. Rest all is well. When are you coming? Namaste to father with folded hands. I have passed in all the subjects in the quarterly examination (illegible).

Kultar Singh got fever on 24th July at night... (illegible)... and on 25th July at day time... (illegible)... but now he is

alright. Don't worry at all on this account. Please, reply soon...(illegible)...Namaste to Mata ji (Grand-ma), Chachi ji. (Illegible)

The next two letters were written in Punjabi/Gurmukhi. Prof. Jagmohan Singh had explained this changeover of the medium in the historical perspective: In pre-partition days in Punjab, Urdu was the first language in almost all the schools, besides being the official language. Hence in those days, one could learn Punjabi either by studying in a Khalsa school, where Punjabi was taught as a second language or under the tutelage of the *Gurdwara* priest (*Granthi*).

In the annals of our history of freedom struggle, Sikhs’ struggle for democratic control of historic shrines became a part of the mainstream freedom movement. It acquired this complexion primarily because the government backed the corrupt and debauch priests (*mahants*) to the hilt whom the Sikh community considered as imposters.

There were different phases of the *Gurdwara* reform movement stretching from 1921 to 1925. Among these, three episodes stand out, each for one reason or the other. The first one related to the birthplace of Guru Nanak at Nankana Sahib, District Sheikhupura. The ghastly killings perpetrated on peaceful pilgrims by the *Mahant* while they entered the *Gurdwara* peacefully and unarmed to pay obeisance at the shrine on early morning of 20 February 1921, which shook the conscience of the nation. More than one hundred pilgrims were killed and their chopped bodies were burnt by sprinkling kerosine over them. This heinous action was committed by hiring ruthless professional criminals.

Young Bhagat Singh visited the shrine on way to his village and also attended a conference there on 5th March. He also took along the calendar, then published under much religious fervour. Many Sikhs in Punjab took to black turbans as a mark of protest. Bhagat Singh too was not to be left behind and he also did likewise.

His visit to Nankana Sahib in the wake of the gruesome killing was in line with his visit to Jallianwala Bagh on 14 April 1919 narrated in the opening pages of this book. Also he, along with his younger **sister Amar Kaur**, learnt Punjabi in Gurmukhi script traditionally associated with Sikhism by virtue of its being the language and script, respectively, of the prime Sikh scripture, i.e., *Guru Granth Sahib*.³

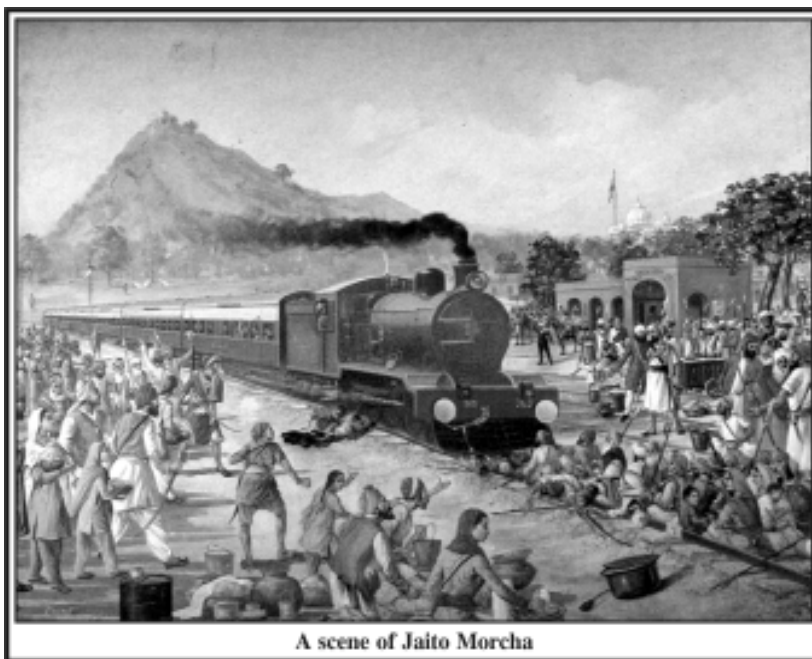
It may also be observed here that these children, though brought

up under the influence of Arya Samaj, were free from any sectarian constraints. Also, it signifies that the rebel in Bhagat Singh was quick to empathise with the Gurdwara movement for a just social cause.

Before reproducing his two Punjabi/Gurmukhi letters (in English version) it may be in place to refer to the second landmark in the Gurdwara reform movement. This was associated with a Gurdwara land near Amritsar called *Guru ka Bagh* which was sought to be encroached upon by the district administration.

The agitation was strictly on non-violent Gandhian lines. The volunteers did not retaliate even when brutally beaten with 'lathis' and were even trampled upon under hoofs of the police horses. Gandhiji sent a congratulatory telegram to Baba Kharak Singh, the President of Sikh Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee complimenting him for "the victory in the first decisive battle for Indian freedom."

The third and the last in the series, *Jaito Morcha* was *inter alia*



A scene of Jaito Morcha

marked by the arrest of Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru during this agitation and his nightlong detention in a jail at Nabha. Bhagat Singh's involvement in the *morcha* was marked by his having served *langar* (community food) to the volunteers resulting in the issuing of his



first arrest warrant.

Both the letters (postcards) in *Gurmukhi* are addressed to his **Chachi Hukam Kaur**, wife of Sardar Swarn Singh:

(1)

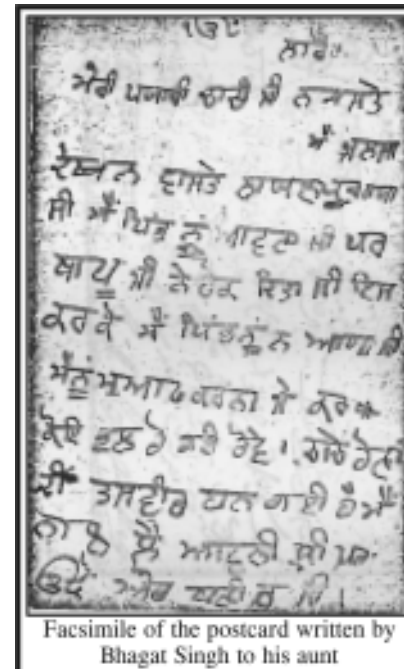
October, 1921.

Ek Onkar

(the sacred invocation to God, the opening words of the Sikh scripture Guru Granth Sahib)

Lahore

My dear Chachi ji,



Namaste.

I went to attend a public meeting at Lyallpur and intended to visit the village (Banga) but father had not allowed me (to do so). That is why I didn't come to the village. Please forgive me if I had made some mistake. Chacha ji's photo is ready and I was to bring it along but it was not complete at that occasion. Please forgive me for this. Reply soon. Obeisance to elder Chachi. Obeisance to Mata ji (grand ma). Namaste to Kulbir and Kultar.

Your son,
Bhagat Singh

[Note: The address is in Urdu and appears to be scribbled by a seasoned writer and at the bottom District Lyallpur is in Roman. Postal stamp-mark: 24 October 1921.]

(2)
Ek Onkar.

My dear Chachi ji,

Namaste. I got late in writing. (Wrote 'lighan' instead of likhan.) Hope you excuse me. Father has gone to Delhi. Mother has gone to Moranwali (her parental village). Rest all is fine. Obeisance to elder Chachi. Obeisance to Mata ji (Grand ma) also. Sat Siri Akal or Namaste to Kultar, Kulbir.

*Yours obediently,
 Bhagat Singh*

(Address on this letter is apparently identical to that on the first letter. Postal stamp-mark: 07 November, 1921.)

[**Courtesy:** Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Teen Murti, New Delhi.]

*Lahore
 14.11.1921*

My reverred Dada Sahib,

It is submitted that all is well here and I pray to God for your welfare. No letters have been received from you for quite some time. What is the reason? Please let me know about the welfare of Kulbir Singh and Kultar Singh. Bebe ji has not come back from Moranwali. All else is fine.

Please convey my Namaste to respected Mata ji. Manga Chamar has not come as yet. I have purchased an old book which I got very cheap.

These days, railway men are readying for a strike. It is believed it will start soon.

*Yours obediently,
 Bhagat Singh.⁴*

These letters have a bearing on the evolution of Bhagat Singh's personality. It shows his close emotional attachment to *Chachi* Hukam Kaur and his regard for his Grandfather as his mentor. His concern for his family members and family's helping hands like Manga is evident. His passing for books, his interest in the public meeting at Lyallpur and above all his mention of the imminent railwaymen's strike are other notable features of these letters.

Bhagat Singh appears to be a compulsive letter writer: It foreshadowed his becoming a prolific and versatile wielder of pen in his revolutionary career.

The Churning: National college

Bhagat Singh's well known contemporaries, Sukh Dev, Bhagwati Charan Vohra, Yash Pal, Jai Dev Gupta and Ram Krishan were his fellow students in National College. This had deep and far-reaching ramifications both for Bhagat Singh as also for the revolutionary movement as the events unfolded. National College, Lahore was established as a follow-up of the Non-Cooperation Movement launched by the Congress in the wake of its call to students to boycott and leave the schools and colleges which were being run under the direct or indirect control of British Government. These National Schools and Colleges were started at various places such as Calcutta, Patna, Aligarh, Delhi, Lahore, etc. Several National Universities such as the National Muslim University of Aligarh, Gujarat Vidyapith, Bihar Vidyapith, Kashi Vidyapith, Bengal National University, Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapith and Punjab Qaumi Vidyapith, Lahore came into being.

These new institutions had some unique features: The first, as mentioned above, was that the students were those who, had had left their colleges due to Non-Cooperation Movement and quite a few of them had been active part in the Movement.

The second feature was that the teaching staff was imbued with deep patriotic fervour, who would inspire the students to serve the country rather than merely hankering after government jobs.

The third feature was that the syllabi comprised of subjects and books on politics and history which would motivate the students to identify themselves with national issues.

Last but not the least was the exposure of the students to the lectures by eminent public figures which gave them a first hand feel of the challenges before the nation.

Bhagat Singh also left DAV school, Lahore in 1921 when he was yet a student of 10th class, to join the National College, Lahore, which was affiliated to Qaumi Vidyapith, Lahore. A doubt would arise regarding the admission of Bhagat Singh in a college when he was only a 10th class student. According to his contemporary and friend Jai Dev Gupta, who too was under-matric, both, he and Bhagat Singh were given two months to prepare themselves for the entrance test.

Both the friends burnt midnight oil for two months and sat for the entrance test and were successful, thus, opening the gates of the college for them. Bhai Parmanand who made a preliminary assessment of the academic abilities of Bhagat Singh, found him to be weak in English, but had a craze for reading books on history and politics, much beyond the syllabus. In his grasp of these two subjects, he was far ahead of his classmates. Above all, *Bhai ji* was impressed by the newcomer's zeal, communication skills; grasp and idealistic vision.⁵

Bhagat Singh was quite a serious and industrious student. History and Politics were his pet subjects. His command over English was not up to the mark. **Yashpal** has thrown some light on this aspect as to how Bhagat Singh had struggled to achieve a high level of command over English. He refers to Bhagat Singh's stint in '*Arjun*' on the recommendation of Jai Chand ji, a Hindi paper published from Delhi. While working for the paper, he won the trust of Pandit Indra ji Vidya Vachaspati by virtue of his hard work and sincerity. Once a telegram was received in English which was given to Bhagat Singh for translation into Hindi for publication in '*Arjun*'. It read: "Chaman Lal editor defunct Nation arrived at Lahore". It was translated "*defunct nation ke sampadak Mr. Chaman Lal Lahore pahunch gaye*". Pandit Ji drew Bhagat Singh's attention to the translation, but the latter failed to see any mistake, since he had assumed that Chaman Lal was editor of a paper titled 'Defunct Nation'. Pandit Ji advised him to refer to dictionary and then it was discovered by Bhagat Singh that 'defunct' meant 'no longer existing or functioning'.

Similarly, Bhagat Singh being crazy for films, once insisted upon his friend Jai Dev Gupta to accompany him but the latter was unwilling, pretending to be suffering from dyspepsia for which he was, purportedly, taking some medicine.

Bhagat Singh finding himself clueless, thought of looking into the dictionary for the meaning of this strange disease, and found it to be plain indigestion.

"To hell with your dyspepsia, rascal!" And dragged him to the cinema hall.

Yashpal further says that Bhagat Singh's English during those days was nowhere as compared to his command over the language as it was, to be for instance, at the time of writing of posters thrown in the assembly on 8 April 1929 and also while explaining revolutionaries' stance in the related trial in the courts which had won universal acclaim.

Nay, some persons had gone to the extent of surmising that these documents had been drafted by some advocates. Yet it was entirely due to the perseverance with which he 'slept, awoke, ate and even walked' in the company of books, mostly in English.⁵

A poster had been published during the hunger strike of Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt in Mianwali jail: Beneath their photos in that poster two sentences from their statement before the court read:

"From under the seeming stillness of the sea of Indian humanity, a veritable storm is about to break out. We have given a fair and loud enough warning."

"By crushing two insignificant units the nation can't be crushed."

A Personal Note:— Prof. Jagmohan Singh had gifted the writer some copies of the original posters. I had displayed one of them in an exhibition among martyr's photographs. Looking at its language thoughtfully, an English lecturer asked me in all earnestness, "Was it written by Bhagat Singh himself?"

Among his comrades perhaps only Bhagwati *Bhai* had an edge over him in this regard.

Yashpal had written about Bhagat Singh's food habits and his passion for *ghee* and milk. Bhagat Singh had a regular account with Kala *halwai* in Anarkali. Whenever he felt like taking milk he went to the shop and would also force it to any one in his company. And they could digest it too. One evening, Yashpal visited Bhagat Singh's vilage near Lahore to discuss some important matter. His mother suggested that first they should take dinner. She put abundant *ghee* (clarified butter) in the vegetables besides making *ghee* dripping chapatis. The amount of *ghee* was enough to 'scare' even a *ghee* lover like Bhagat Singh!

"Bebe, can anybody take this much of *ghee*?" said the annoyed son, "You spoil the taste of vegetable."

Mother in disgust, placing her finger over her cheek, complained to Yashpal. "Look at this boy; he does not take anything. He refuses



to take what he should. That is why he looks so weak.” Yashpal with a meaningful look at the burly Bhagat Singh said, “If he is weak, then I for one have ceased to exist.” Mother, thereupon, suppressing her laughter rebuked, “Come on you good for nothing! such words are not uttered; One falls prey to evil eye.”⁷

There is also a portrayal of Bhagat Singh’s shabby appearance in Yashpal’s accounts of Bhagat Singh’s appearance.

Written in a lighter vein, this has some bearing on the public image of Bhagat Singh:

“From the cute looking Bhagat Singh, sporting a hi-fi hat, and well-set fine moustaches, appearing in his photographs found here and there, no one can visualize the boy’s actual appearance. A comely boy, fair complexioned with ill-cared long hair, small moustaches and a bit large sized eyes. He sported a loosely wrapped *khadar* mini-turban on head, with both its ends dangling on his shoulders. On the lower half, he wore a loosely wrapped piece of coarse cloth ‘dhoti’, instead of a pyjama! We, his classmates had coined various funny epithets regarding the almond like shape of his eyes and of his unwieldy figure like that of a young camel.”⁸ The closest resemblance to Bhagat Singh of those days is available in police photograph taken in 1927 during his first arrest.

Bhagat Singh had a flair for writing also. According to Yashpal, while he himself wrote only in Hindi, Bhagat Singh tried his hand on writing in Punjabi and Urdu as well.

“For dissemination of our ideas, we, the students of the National College adopted the medium of theatre. The focus was on making the audience aware of their slavery. A National Dramatic Club was started in the college. Bhagat Singh used to take active part in the dramas. The club once staged the drama “The Dawn of the Yug of Samrat Chandra Gupta Maurya.” Bhagat Singh played the role of the hero Shashi Gupta. The drama was a grand success and Bhagat Singh’s role was commendable. The audience heartily applauded his role. All his college teachers and fellow students complimented him on his sterling performance. Giving his blessings to him, Bhai Paramnand remarked, “My Bhagat Singh will really be Shashi Gupta of the age in future.”

The club staged various other historical plays such as “Maharana Partap”, “Mahabharat”, etc., in each of which Bhagat Singh played a leading role. The aim of these plays, as hinted above, was to arouse

national feelings and exhort the people to rise against slavery.

According to Yashpal, “Script of play *Mahabharat* was available in Urdu. By rewriting its dialogues, we made it serve our purpose. We had re-named it ‘Krishan Vijay’. We projected the English people as *Kauravs* and our own patriots as *Pandavs*: So also we modulated some of the songs in Punjabi. “*Kade tun vee Hindya hosh sambhal Oe*” (You Indian wake up now.) “*Tera ghar-bar videshi lut lai gaye aur tu bekhabar so reha hai*” (Foreigners had ruined your home and hearth while you are snoring.) “*Oh lootne wale hamare sath ziaditian nah kar, hum teri sab chalakyan samajh chuke hain.*” (Oh you exploiter, don’t indulge in excesses! We see through all your traps.) This song had been set on the tune of popular song of 1907, ‘*Pagri Sambhal Oe Jatta, Pagri Sambhal Oe*’ (O peasant, take care of your headgear — penned by Banke Dayal). Not unexpectedly, the government banned the recitation of such songs being held seditious. Yet we kept on staging such plays off and on. Once, we also staged a play *Bharat Durdasha* on the sidelines of a Congress conference at Gujranwala in October 1925.”⁹

A photograph of Bhagat Singh with turban among a group of



dramatic club team, after having staged the play, *Bharat Durdasha* is presently available.

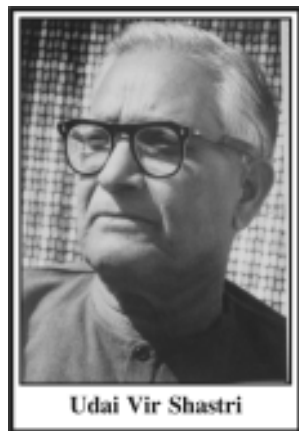
The College Principal in those days was Acharya Jugal Kishore ji, a great patriot, who had just returned from England after completing his studies. Bhai Parmanand, having undergone transportation for life

in Andamans for his participation in the *Ghadr* movement of 1914-15 was a venerable personality among the faculty. His simple style of life was his distinction.

There was another teacher Jai Chandra Vidyalankar, the founder head of Gurukul Kangri. He held the torch of political awareness alive in the college, but who, later, stooped so low as to dub Bhagwati Charan a C.I.D. man, just out of a personal grudge. Among other eminent teachers, Prof. Chhabil Das was noteworthy. He later became the Principal. He made his mark in writing revolutionary literature. One of his writings titled '*Chingarian*' was so popular that it continued to be published right till 1947 and even afterwards. This writer, too, had seen a copy of this publication at a relative's house as a child and the title being so striking, had left a mark on his memory.

Another Hindi teacher was Uday Shankar Bhatt who later became an eminent Hindi writer, who resided in Bhagwati *Bhai's* house as a tenant, and was very thick with him and intimate with others like Bhagat Singh, Sukh Dev, Yashpal, etc., too.

Udai Vir Shastri was a very young teacher in Sanskrit, a pet subject of Bhagat Singh. He too was Bhagwati's neighbour, and a family friend of him. He went all the way to Delhi in April 1929 to bestow care upon his favourite *chela*.



"Among the students there was Sukh Dev from Lyallpur. His father had died when he was a child and he was brought up by his father's elder brother Lala Achint Ram, a prominent Congressman and a respected public figure. He had courted arrest in Non-Cooperation Movement and his photographs in prisoner's uniform in fetters adorned Sukhdev's table. Jai Dev was his cousin, and

both of them had joined the Lahore National College together.¹⁰

Bhagat Singh's stay in the college was cut short abruptly in 1923 after he had passed F.A. and just taken admission in BA. This was in the wake of family's eagerness to get him married.

Among the assets of the college a related institution Dwarka Das Library — also played a sterling role. The library became, in the true sense of the word, a nursery of revolutionary thought and was always full of young students perusing books on history, politics, etc.

The question as to what kind of books attracted the attention of the students in the wake of fizzling out of the Non-Cooperation Movement had also been dealt with by **Yashpal**. He mentions books like '*My struggle for Irish Freedom*' by Den O' Bren, biographies of Mazzini, and Garibaldi, *History of the French Revolution*, *Revolutionary Ideas of Voltaire*, Victor Hugo, Kropatkin and other Russian revolutionaries, besides novels of writers like Tugnin, *History of Indian Satyagrah Movements*, *Bandi Jeevan* by Sachindra Nath Sanyal and Report of the Rowlatt Committee which contains a blow-by-blow account of all the revolutionary movements prior to 1917. The notorious 'Rowlatt Bill' (Black Act) was based on this report, which, for the first time, evoked spontaneous nation-wide protests unprecedented in India's freedom struggle.

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3

ON THE THRESHOLD

Bhagat Singh was the pet of his grandmother and the cynosure of his *Chachi's eyes*. As for his grand-ma, she had earlier lost her first grandson Jagat Singh 5-6 years ago, when he was just 11. Now all her grand-motherly affection was focussed on Bhagat Singh. The thought of getting him married caught her fancy and she got almost possessed by it. She was used to having the last word on all important family matters which none could dare defy. On the other hand, Bhagat Singh was dreaming only of freedom. His father Sardar Kishan Singh was in a terrible dilemma: He had on one hand an adamant mother and a stubborn son on the other," writes Verinder.



Ms. Verinder Sandhu
D/o S. Kultar Singh

Verinder had expounded her own version of the state of mind of Sardar Kishan Singh at this juncture by posing the question as to what he thought of this son's future? According to her, "though many people, by merely observing his outward self had held him to be backward- looking and being bent upon keeping Bhagat Singh tied to the apron strings of the home and hearth: I feel pained that such people had not sympathetically viewed Sardar Kishan Singh's predicament: What sort of 'weakness'? After a lot of analysis and pondering, I have come to the conclusion that his interest in his son's marriage was not his weakness but only a

reflection of difference in perception. He knew the latent qualities of his son and desired that his son should become a radical like Lokmanya Tilak.... Going a little beyond, I can assert that he visualized his son to become a person like Subhash Chandra Bose. Possibly, he had never reckoned with the eventuality of his son going to the scaffold, nor could he swallow it. He had also a first hand knowledge of the

plight of his younger brother Ajit Singh, his friend Rash Bihari Bose and Kartar Singh Sarabha's experience of attempting an open revolt in India. As for his support to the *Ghadrites*, it has to be kept in view that he had simply extended financial help to them. However, he had never agreed with them regarding their strategy. He had made it clear to them that their strategy may have worked in USA, but shall not work here.

"...Every moment of Sardar Kishan Singh's life remained dedicated to the cause of India's freedom till the last, and he, in any case, unlike the Arya Samajist educationist Mahatma Hans Raj, who, upon sentencing of his son in Delhi Conspiracy Case in 1915 to transportation for life had publicly disowned him, continued to maintain his close rapport with all the revolutionaries of India. His weakness was not that he was anti-revolutionary; rather it was his concern as a father which was beyond his control. In anger, he lost his temper to the extent that he not only abused but often severely beat his son often on trifles. Had he really insisted on Bhagat Singh's engagement and marriage, he would not have kept silent later in this matter during 1924-25 when Bhagat Singh remained in his continuous contact. Would the topic, had (then) never become an apple of discord even once? But we know for certain that it did not. And as for his parental affection, he nurtured it till the last. In sum, Sardar Kishan Singh never 'insisted' on his son's matrimony though he did have a 'desire' for it."¹

As it transpired, a well off landlord family of a nearby village Manawala was eager for engaging their daughter to Bhagat Singh. That family came to the boy's house for first-hand contact as per the tradition. Bhagat Singh appeared to be quite in high spirits on that occasion. He himself drove their family '*tonga*' to drop them back to their place as per protocol. They had set the mind on Bhagat Singh, and they appeared a few days later with the formal proposal for engagement, as a prelude to marriage. Since Bhagat Singh had, by his cheerful conduct during those days, not given any hint of dissent, every one presumed his consent — as per the dictum 'silence is half consent'.

Bhagat Singh in those days kept on playfully chatting with his mother about the prospects of the bride of an affluent family coming to live in their family with a modest standard of living. (It is recorded in the cassette with the writer.) He argued with his mother that since he had been sent with the girl's family as '*kochwan*' (tonga driver),

how can he now become their son-in-law? “O... Bebe, I learn the girl is too plump: would she be able to help you in your kitchen” and then “It is said that they would be giving an elephant in dowry. Where shall we tether that animal and how shall we manage his feed?”

One can only conjecture as to why Bhagat Singh behaved like that; but the net outcome was that the family looked forward to the finalization of the marriage of Bhagat Singh.

But as to why did he leave home to evade being tied in matrimony, is not difficult to understand. A sharp mind like that of Bhagat Singh had seen the consequences of a revolutionary getting married: He had observed his *Chachis'* predicament; he had shared their agony.

That he had to leave well ahead of the proposed date of engagement ceremony is beyond doubt. But **Prof. Jagmohan Singh** had mentioned an episode which could also have provoked him to leave. Sardar Kishan Singh, once in a heat of anger, having got a hint of Bhagat Singh's intention to leave home, taunted him thus: “You may be under the illusion that being Ajit Singh's nephew and Kishan Singh's son, you are ‘somebody’ and that is why you want to leave home.”²

Bhagat Singh's leaving his home meant that he had taken the first decisive step towards his goal of life — the ‘Revolution’. While leaving, he had left behind a letter in his father's office drawer at Lahore:

Respected Father,

My life has been committed to a noble cause — the cause of the freedom of India. For that reason comforts and worldly desires have no attraction in my life.

You might remember at the time of my sacred thread ceremony, when I was quite young, Bapu ji (Grandfather) had declared that I was being pledged for the service of the country.

I am, therefore, honouring the pledge of that time.

I hope you will excuse me.

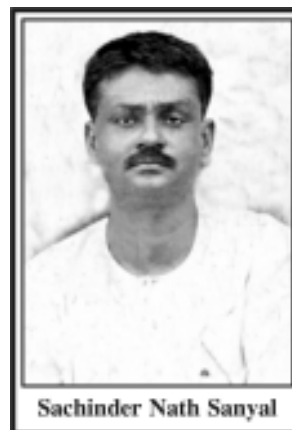
Yours obediently,
Bhagat Singh³

Unfortunately, the original letter is not anywhere on record: Had it been accessible, possibly it may have given a clue regarding the date of his disappearance.

According to Verinder, Bhagat Singh had made up his mind to follow the path of renunciation of family ties well before this episode. If the question of his marriage had not arisen, perhaps he might have yet continued living with his family. That is to say Bhagat Singh was

catapulted to the status of a full-fledged revolutionary at a very early stage of his life, which, otherwise might have been delayed, but how much this delay could have been is anybody's guess.

Sachindra Sanyal had written in his '*Bandi Jeewan*' that he was



Sachinder Nath Sanyal

in close contact with Bhagat Singh those days in connection with raising of a new revolutionary party, which soon materialised in the shape of Hindustan Republican Association (H.R.A.). Not only that, he was banking upon Bhagat Singh as his associate while recruiting youngmen from Punjab for H.R.A. He narrates his version of Bhagat Singh leaving his family in '*Bandi Jeewan*':

“While once talking to Bhagat Singh I learnt that his father Sarder Kishan Singh was preparing to get him married. I felt, that since I had committed a blunder by getting

married, I must tell Bhagat Singh that if he gets married he will not be able to participate in the revolutionary activities with all his heart and soul. Bhagat Singh himself didn't want to get married. I asked Bhagat Singh, “Are you ready to quit home? In case you stay at home, your family will get you married. I don't want that you should get married. That is why I desire that you should leave home and stay where I advise you to stay.” Bhagat Singh agreed to do so. Then, Bhagat Singh was sent by me to Jogesh Chatterji at Kanpur with my letter.”⁴



Jogesh Chander Chatterji

Jogesh recalls, “Sanyal Babu had given Bhagat Singh a letter for me and sent him to Kanpur. It was in the daytime that he arrived at our place and gave me that letter. We talked but I did not know where to put him up for the night. I was staying at the Bengali hostel where all the residents were Bengalees. The sudden presence of a Sikh youth could create suspicions with the police. However, he had to be accommodated there itself. Amusingly, while coming from the station he put his luggage in some *Dharmshala*. He did not

remember the name or precise location of that *Dharmshala*. He and myself both went out to find out that *Dharmshala* to bring his luggage. We searched most of the *Dharmshalas* near the station but did not find the particular one in which he had put his luggage. At last when we decided to come back to our mess disappointed, postponing the search for the next day at about 10 PM he chanced to pinpoint out that *Dharmshala* and we brought his luggage to the Patkapur mess. That was the beginning of his new life at Kanpur. Although he had a full grown beard, yet he was young of a raw age.

“Since he was staying in the mess his first acquaintances in Kanpur were its members. But he used to pass most of his time with me. He was an intelligent and very inquisitive youth and he evinced interest in many things. We used to talk and discuss for hours the general political life in the country, the form of revolution most suitable for the Indian conditions, different aspects of revolutions in other countries and particularly in Russia which was looked on by the entire world as a laboratory experiment and a pilot project, so to say, for the new systems to be emulated after the coming of the great world revolution. Bhagat Singh wanted to know what the Communists stood for. His inquisitiveness was insatiable; he was no blind-follower. His youthful mind was ever alert to assess and grasp any new idea.

“It was the time when the Kanpur Bolshevik Conspiracy Case was going on in the sessions court and it was a topic of discussion everywhere in the city. Four persons who were accused in it, Nalini Das Gupta, S.A. Dange, Muzaffar Ahmad and Shankar Chmani were charged with having established contact with M.N. Roy who was incharge of the Third International with its headquarters at Moscow. I too got an opportunity to meet the four accused in the court during the recess when the C.I.D. people had left the Court.

“Since the arrival of Bhagat Singh at Patkapur mess we were over cautious because the presence of a Sikh youth in a Bengali mess might have attracted the notice of police and made them suspicious. We had no source of income and consequently our financial position was very hard. We thought about the matter but there was no suitable place where Bhagat Singh could be shifted easily. It was at this time that a remedy to these problems was gifted by circumstances. Prof. Jai Chander Vidyalankar happened to come at Kanpur for some work. He also saw the practical difficulties involved in Bhagat Singh’s stay



at Patkapur mess. He met **Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi ji** and mentioned this to him, who gladly said he would give a room to him in ‘Pratap’ office, Bhagat Singh would learn journalism there and since it was a place where so many persons come, his stay there would not attract any suspicion: He offered Rs. 10/- per month to him as scholarship to learn journalism. Bhagat Singh’s room where he was put up was in the inner portion of the building. So in this way the problem of stay as well as of financial relief were solved and we also felt relieved.

“Prior to this Bhagat Singh had been vending newspapers to meet his personal expenses.

“In a short time, Bhagat Singh won his editor’s confidence and started his apprenticeship in the field of writing, under such a towering personality, a talent which Bhagat Singh exploited to the hilt to further his mission of life. To conceal his true identity, Bhagat Singh wrote under the assumed name, ‘Balwant’. He, while working as an employee in the press, used his spare time to study the histories of revolutions in the world, and also the histories of freedom movements in different countries. The latest developments in Soviet Union in the context of Bolshevik Revolution in October, 1917 was an event of his keen interest.”⁶

Regarding the precise month and year of his leaving Lahore for Kanpur, there is no certainty. The only clue available is that, according to Verinder, Bhagat Singh was persuaded to return home almost six months after leaving Lahore.⁶ This clue taken in conjunction with the record available about Bhagat Singh having served food to an Akali *Jatha* in his village Banga, during the *Jaito Gurdwara* agitation in mid-April 1924, indicates that Bhagat Singh might have left home in August-September 1923.

Back home

While Bhagat Singh was engrossed in his own mission of life, all was not well on the domestic front. Everyone, was worried about his welfare and whereabouts. In the meantime, his grandmother fell ill. The old lady was desperate to meet her grandson.

There were different versions as to how Bhagat Singh was located by his family in Kanpur and then summoned. However, the most plausible one is narrated by Jai Dev Gupta. He prevailed upon Ram Chander, a family friend who had received a letter from Bhagat Singh, to accompany him to Kanpur. Both went there some time in October 1923. There they met Vidyarthi ji and told him about the serious condition of Bhagat Singh's grandmother and of her desire to see her grandson. According to Jai Dev Gupta, Bhagat Singh hid himself and did not meet them. So they left a message with Vidyarthi ji to the effect that Bhagat Singh be informed about the illness of his grandmother and also of his parent's assurance that he would not be married on his return home. Then they came back to Lahore. Jai Dev Gupta requested Sardar Kishan Singh to write a letter to his friend Maulana Hasrat Mohani giving a categorical assurance that Bhagat Singh would not be asked to get married. That was done and the letter written by his father was shown to Bhagat Singh. Mohani also prevailed upon Vidyarthi ji to persuade Bhagat Singh to return to Lahore.⁷

Verinder adds that Sardar Kishan Singh had placed an advertisement in 'Vande Matram' that "Bhagat Singh, wherever he is, should return; his grandmother is seriously ill." This had come to the notice of Vidyarthi ji but he did not know that 'Balwant' was in fact Bhagat Singh from the family of great revolutionaries, Sardar Ajit Singh and Sardar Kishan Singh. It is only when Jai Dev Gupta and Ram Chander approached Vidyarthi ji, that the secret was revealed to him. Why then did they go to Vidyarthi ji? It was because in the letter received by Ram Chander from Bhagat Singh, the address given was care of Vidyarthi ji. They could not meet Bhagat Singh but explained the whole matter to Vidyarthi ji.⁸

"Once back home, the autumn in the family instantly turned into spring! No one even raised or mentioned the topic of marriage — as per the saying, 'once bitten twice shy'. Bhagat Singh on his part put his heart and soul in nursing his grandmother, which could put even the best nurse to shame. Besides the medicines and diet he provided a lot of food for laughter. Soon the old lady was in the best of health. Bhagat Singh now started shuttling between Banga to be with grandmother and Lahore. Sometimes he would return within a day or two, and sometimes his absence extended to many days at a stretch," writes Verinder.

As shall be seen later, this moving in and out of home became the



Kartar Singh Sarabha

norm with Bhagat Singh in his subsequent revolutionary career. It was not fortuitous that the Tribunal in its judgment of Lahore Conspiracy Case of 1930 pinpointed Bhagat Singh alone as being 'ubiquitous'. Significantly the same adjective had been used by the Special Tribunal in 1915-16 for **Kartar Singh Sarabha**, Bhagat Singh's role model, and in that case too for him and him alone:

Significantly Bhagat Singh had boldly underlined the relevant lines in the original text of the Judgement of Lahore

Conspiracy Case 1914-15, which is accessible at Khatkar Kalan Museum.⁹

Now, something about the events leading to issuing of first warrants of arrest against Bhagat Singh.

Serving food to *Jaito morcha* agitators

To perceive the Gurdwara reform movement in the perspective of our freedom struggle, two aspects need to be kept in view. One: the widely prevailing phenomenon of one kind of vested interest being aligned with others of the same species. In this case too, the corrupt and the debauch priests (*mahants*) were controlling the historic Sikh Gurdwaras and were openly and unashamedly flouting not only religious edicts of Sikhism but also the ordinary constraints of social life. Any challenge to their status was bound to disturb the alien rulers as per the 'domino theory' — the theory that: 'Today them, tomorrow us'!

The second aspect is a corollary of the first and is thus complementary. For the lovers of India's freedom any one who challenged vested interests, evoked their sympathy and even empathy. Only this kind of sentiment could impel Bhagat Singh even as a child to perceive an identity between the massacre of Jallianwala Bagh and of Nankana Sahib two years later, despite their disparate historical contexts.

As for this particular Gurdwara campaign called the *Jaito Morcha*, its unique feature was the spark that triggered it. It had not so much to do with Sikhism or its historic shrines: The root cause was political, namely, the conduct of Maharaja of Nabha, Ripudaman Singh, who,

in sharp contrast to the spineless fraternity of the Indian princes, had dared to act firmly and boldly in public interest more than once.

During his two year's stint in the Legislative Council as Crown Prince, Ripudaman Singh had done enough to earn the wrath of the alien rulers.

Then after becoming the Maharaja, he maintained the same stance. For instance, Nabha was the only State which openly joined the rest of Sikh community to observe Nankana Sahib firing day as 'Black Day'.

Hence the rulers were waiting for an excuse to oust him: The excuse was provided by the inter-dynastical clash of Patiala and Nabha States, which had been actually the rule rather than an exception. Lo, the British troops took control of the palace on 8 June, 1923 and the Maharaja was deposed and externed from his state.

Since Ripudaman Singh was popular both among his people as well as among the freedom lovers, it was bound to evoke protest. On 5 August 1923, Shromani Gurdwara Committee, the leading Sikh body, in its meeting passed a resolution calling upon the Sikh community to observe 9th September as 'Nabha Day' by holding congregations, continuous recitations of the Holy Granth Sahib and by passing protest resolutions. In retaliation, as per the orders of the State Administrator William Johnston, armed police forced their entry into the historic Gurdwara at Jaito (now in Faridkot District) on 14th September to disrupt the continuous recitation-'*Akhand Path*' of the Holy Granth and from among the congregation arrested one and all: Even the person performing the recitation ritual was not spared. This was deemed as the most gross insult to the Sikh traditions and values. Thus a purely political issue acquired religious complexion as well.

The agitation was centrally controlled from the holy Akal Takht at Amritsar. Batches of 500 unarmed and peaceful *Satyagrahis* were directed to reach the Jaito Gurdwara and to resume religious recitation. They were fired at, beaten up and lathi charged and prosecuted too. Sikhs from all over the country, and also from abroad got drawn into the *Morcha*.

The 5th such *jatha* was scheduled to be at village Banga at the time of lunch. It left Lyallpur city on 12 April 1924 and was expected to reach Amritsar, the controlling centre of the agitation, on 26 April. As per official record "...in 1924, he (Bhagat Singh) went to Chak No. 105, GB, where his father's land was situated. While being there, he took care of the Lyallpur Shaheedi (martyrs) *Jatha*. Consequently

he was booked under Criminal Law Amendment Act., section 17 whereupon he absconded. During that period, he was in UP. It is reported that having gone to UP, he stayed for a month at Kanpur. While there, he remained in the company of Hasrat Mohani. He was stated to have gone to Aligarh from Kanpur and worked for 3 months as the headmaster of National Muslim University School."¹⁰

Since the *Jatha* had to tread long distances on foot to reach Jaito, they had to halt overnight at a number of places, and to have food. The number of each batch being 500, pre-arrangements for food and stay had to be made. Since their route was pre-ordained, the pro-government elements did their utmost to deny them even drinking water by resorting to all foul means, just for pleasing their masters.

According to Verinder, two Akali leaders Sardar Kartar Singh and Sardar Jawala Singh approached Sardar Kishan Singh at Lahore soliciting his cooperation for *langar* at his village. He must have arranged it personally, but he, due to a prior commitment at Mumbai was not in a position to do so. He entrusted the responsibility to his under-seventeen son Bhagat Singh. However, another scion of the family Sardar Dilbagh Singh stood out as the hurdle being the most loyal servant of the empire who was designated as Honorary Magistrate, a post cherished by sycophants. He always projected himself to be all-powerful in the eyes of the rulers; that nothing could happen in and around his village without his nod: As aptly put by Verinder, the scenario was like "a *Morcha* within a *Morcha*!"

Now, the people at large were pro-agitation at heart but were overawed by the fear of earning the wrath of Government, police and above all persons like Sardar Dilbagh Singh, whose help they had to solicit whenever in trouble from government officials: This latent fear became real by the hordes of armed police men seen hovering around the village.

On the 'D-day', the young boy of 17 arranged *langar* at an open place outside the village, and not only got the *Jatha* served with food but also delivered a speech eulogising martyrs and revolutionaries.

Expectedly, Sardar Dilbag Singh took it as a direct affront and wanted Bhagat Singh to be put in jail and succeeded in getting a case registered against him.

Dr. G.S. Sidhu in his article (*Punjabi Tribune*, dated 04.08.2000) had cited excerpts from Bhagat Singh's personal C.I.D. File, scanning the period from his birth to 1926, concluding with his role in

establishment of *Bharat Naujwan Sabha*.¹¹

Bhagat Singh remained underground even after the agitation was called off in April 1925, because of the influence of Dilbagh Singh, and the case was withdrawn only during the last days of 1925.

As per the said C.I.D. report, Bhagat Singh was also suspected of having distributed leaflets in Lahore in February 1925. Also he was reported to have taken part in a political drama staged at Gujranwala in October 1925. Besides, during his abscondence, he got involved in the agitation against enhancement of canal water rates led by *Zamindar Sabha*.

Significantly, Bhagat Singh, while being at Kanpur, came to know of the havoc caused by floods near Kanpur. He put his body and soul, day and night in relief and rescue work. This showed another facet of Bhagat Singh's personality — an overwhelming urge to serve the suffering fellow beings, in every possible manner!¹²

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4

HINDUSTAN REPUBLICAN ASSOCIATION

The Hindustan Republican Association (HRA) had been formed at Benaras during 1922-23 with a view to extend the revolutionary network to the whole of India: Till then one of the oldest and vibrant radical groups Anushilan Samiti was confined to Bengal, which, of course, then included Bihar and Orissa. Its chief negotiator and later an eminent leader of HRA was **Yogesh Chatterji** for Anushilan Samiti and from the other side was **Shachinder Sanyal**, right hand of Rash Bihari Bose of Hardinge Bomb fame and later the supremo of Ghadr Party during its peak days of 1914-15; he had recently been prematurely released from his life term detention in Andamans, under an Amnesty. HRA aimed at setting up a Republican form of Government in India, declaring Socialism as its ultimate goal: But the roadmap of transition to Socialism was left to be decided by the people's representatives elected on the principle of universal adult franchise.

Soon after its formation it was decided between them that Yogesh would shift to Kanpur and set himself up there because it was the central and industrial place in India. Fortunately it was also the centre of revolutionary activities in U.P.: In Kanpur they had connections with the press, people and publications.

Bhagat Singh's association with H.R.A. began with his visits and stay at Kanpur during 1923. Besides, as per C.I.D. File No. 9349, Bhagat Singh during his period of abscondence was suspected of being involved in the distribution of revolutionary leaflets in Lahore in February 1925. Since the pamphlet 'Revolutionary' was circulated during the last days of January 1925, most probably, it was the same pamphlet which he had distributed in Lahore in February 1925.

Also, it is not incidental that the copies of the basic documents of H.R.A., the Manifesto and the Constitution were found by police in almost every hide-out of the revolutionaries of H.S.R.A. during the police raids in connection with Lahore Conspiracy Case, 1930.

Following the trials of the leading figures of H.R.A. in the Kakori

Case, Bismil, Ashfaqulla, Roshan Singh and Rajendra Lahiri were sentenced to death. The appeal against the verdict of the Session Court went to the High Court, then called Oudh High Court. The High Court, in its judgment delivered on 22 August, 1927 had also dealt with the ideological background of the conspiracy relying on both these documents.¹

Bhagat Singh had developed quite a few contacts with youngmen from U.P. and Punjab who shared his passion for revolution and had persuaded them to join the H.R.A. To prepare the people for revolution, he wrote, published and managed to distribute leaflets of revolutionary nature. He chose fairs for the purpose — the most practical and effective mode of their distribution and dissemination. Dr. G.S. Deol had cited an interesting anecdote: During the Puja (Dussehra) festival once, Bhagat Singh and his five companions proceeded on the mission of distribution of revolutionary leaflets. They came to a 'mela' at Pratapgarh. At a certain spot where there was a big crowd, Bhagat Singh and his companions started distributing leaflets captioned, '*Jago Mere Desh Ke Logo*' (Wake up my fellow countrymen). The policemen in plain clothes also happened to be standing among the people. The moment they saw the leaflets, they began assaulting the distributors and arrested two of them. Seeing that two of his comrades had been overpowered by the police, Bhagat Singh played a ruse and stealthily threw all the leaflets a little away on another side. The crowd then rushed to that side. He then went to the policemen and pointed towards the rushing crowd saying that the 'Congressmen' were distributing leaflets there. The policemen rushed to that side leaving only two of them to secure the arrested duo. The moment the policemen rushed to that side and got lost in thronging crowd, Bhagat Singh and his comrades pounced upon those two guarding policemen and rescued their comrades and ran away from the *mela*. The police and some members of the public chased them. Bhagat Singh fired 2-3 pistol shots in the air, which frightened them and they gave up the chase.²

Kanpur having become the *de facto* headquarter of H.R.A., it naturally became the centre of attention of C.I.D. also. Besides, the party was preparing for a major 'action', aimed at freeing Bismil from jail. Hence the revolutionaries were extra-cautious and avoided being at Kanpur. Thus, Vidyarthi ji got Bhagat Singh appointed headmaster

of a National School in village Shadipur, Tehsil Kher, District Aligarh where he stayed at the house of Thakur Todar Singh (later Congress M.L.A.). Writes Verinder, "Bhagat Singh did a remarkable job, to the extent that one could safely assume that had he not become a revolutionary, he must have become a great teacher."³

Shiv Verma's Memoirs

Shiv Verma, a close associate of Bhagat Singh, had written extensively about his visits to him in his 'Reminiscences'. He and Jai Dev were contemporaries in college. The period of their stay in the college has also come on judicial record. Vidyadhar, Head Clerk of D.A.V. College, Kanpur while appearing in Lahore Conspiracy Case



on 20th August as prosecution witness, produced the admission record of the college in respect of Shiv Verma, Jai Dev Kapur, Mahavir and Brahm Dutt specifying the period of their respective stay in the college as under:

- (a) Shiv Verma S/o Kanhaya Lal Verma, 'Kaisth', resident of Hardoi, age 18.5, joined the college on the 6 July 1925. After passing the Intermediate Science Examination in April, 1927, he rejoined the college in July, 1927 and left college finally in April, 1928.
- (b) Jai Dev S/o Salig Ram, Kapur Khatri, age 16 years, resident of Hardoi, joined the college on 9 July 1925 and finally left

the college in April, 1927 after passing the Intermediate Science Examination.

- (c) Brahm Dutt, S/o Ram Rattan Misra, Brahmin, born on 10 July 1909, resident of Kanpur, joined on 13 July 1927 and must have left in April, 1928 as he did not rejoin.
- (d) Mahabir Singh S/o Devi Singh 'Rathaur', Rajput, resident of Shahpur Tehla, age 19 years. Joined the college on the 13th July, 1925 and left the college in April, 1928.⁴

Besides there was testimony of a fellow student of Shiv Verma, namely Ude Parkash who appeared as P.W. No. 372 before the Special Tribunal. He had shared a room with Shiv Verma from July, 1927 to April, 1928. According to him, "Surinder Nath Pandey and Brahm Dutt used to visit Shiv Verma frequently. Their conversation usually related to methods for gaining freedom for India. Occasionally they used to ask me to go out of the room and sometimes they used to go out themselves.

"Among the books which Shiv Verma used to read was one in Hindi, consisting of two parts, which dealt with the lives of persons who had died for India. I have forgotten the name of the book. Another book was in English related to the revolution in Ireland. There was also one in English about the revolution in Russia.

"Once when Shiv Verma was not in the room, I saw a yellow coloured pamphlet (presumably constitution of the H.R.A.), which I took up and read. When Shiv Verma returned, he said to me, 'You have not read the pamphlet, have you?' I replied, 'I have read it. Was there any harm in my doing so? Thereupon, he said, 'There is no harm done. But you should not mention the matter to anyone.'"⁵

Shiv Verma had left behind a rich legacy in the form of his *Sansmritiyan* about his martyr Comrades besides his dear 'Sardar', replete with juicy graphic details. The present writer, way back in 1967, with co-operation of young men like (Prof.) Jagmohan Singh got his write-up on Bhagat Singh translated into Punjabi and sold it in thousands in Punjab. Till date, those 'youngmen' now in mature middle age, recall the anecdotes from this writing as if they had read it only yesterday. Presently, it had been translated into English titled 'Reminiscences'. Besides Bhagat Singh, Shiv Verma has portrayed Raj Guru, Sukh Dev, Azad, Jatin Das, Bhagwati Charan Vohra and Mahavir too in this monumental work.

The writer had also the privilege to enjoy close personal contact both with Shiv Verma and his bosom friend Jai Dev Kapur, who both had stayed with his family during his stay at Guru Nanak Engineering College on more than one occasion. **Jai Dev Kapur** met the writer last on 29 September, 1979 upon Golden Jubilee celebrations of Martyr Jatin at Dina Nagar (Gurdaspur) from where they all travelled back to Ludhiana in the same car. That evening he had recorded his interview. A few excerpts are reproduced in the concluding pages of this chapter.

Recalls Shiv Verma, "A friend from Delhi, Kashi Ram, wrote that some Punjabi gentleman was coming to Kanpur to meet Jai Dev and me. Since we had joined the revolutionary party only a few days back, hence very few people knew us outside Kanpur.

"The letter read: 'I had been introduced to him (Bhagat Singh) at the banks of Yamuna where I live. He is very close to you. He wanted to come to Kanpur for some work. I gave him the address of both of you. He will himself do the rest of the introduction.'

"On reading the letter we felt upset. 'Who knows whom he had sent to us after revealing all the secrets.' Therefore we searched the room thoroughly to remove all books except the text books. Those days we lived in the red bungalow of the college hostel. Jai Dev had kept a spinning wheel of Gandhi *Baba* in his room, that too was removed. We then settled between us, that if the Punjabi gentleman goes to Jai Dev first, he should not be introduced to me and *vice versa*.

"Lo and behold, one day in the morning hours when I was completing my college work, I heard someone enquiring about me, on hearing which I came out. I saw a Sikh youth clad in dirty '*salwar-kameez*' and wrapped in a blanket standing before me — tall, fair-complexioned with small but sharp piercing eyes,...a beautiful face with unshorn hair and turban. 'This is Shiv Verma' said my neighbour on seeing me.

"The newcomer hugged me with open arms as if we were old friends. Then holding my hands he dragged me into my room as if the room was not mine but his. It being a small room, I had placed my bed on a cot outside the room. Without any hesitation and formality, he sat on the bed and pulling my hand asked me to sit close by. 'My name is

Ranjit. I shall stay here for a few days. I have heard about you and Jai Dev from your friend in Delhi. I am also your fellow traveller.' After a pause, he asked, 'Do you know Bijay and Surinder Pandey?'

"His behaviour, his sincere smiling face and loving looks had disarmed me in the very first meeting and then it was well nigh impossible for me to mistrust him. All my defences had crumbled and I replied with the same ease, "Yes, I know them." "Then ask both of them to meet me here," he said. Then asked after a while, 'Where is Jai Dev?' This time I told a lie. Gathering my wits, I said, 'He has gone somewhere, he is not here.'

"Ranjit guessed that I had concealed the truth from him. He felt sad for a while. He had brought Victor Hugo's novel "La Miserable" with him. He began to read it quietly — as if someone had suddenly put a spoke in his laughter, conversation and frank behaviour.

"No doubt I had told a lie and it pinched my heart. I could not stand Bhagat Singh's sadness and I went to college to send for Vijay. When Surinder Pandey too was given the message, he said that Ranjit was an old partyman."

"It was lunch time when I returned from college. Jai Dev and I would usually go together to dine in the mess, I took Ranjit along. There were only three of us at lunch. Ranjit was sitting next to Jai Dev, but considering him to be some stranger he didn't take notice of the latter. But when Jai Dev quietly poured a liberal dose of *hot ghee* in his '*dal*', Ranjit first stared at Jai Dev and then looked at me with inquisitive eyes. Both of us had a hearty laugh at his predicament. He exclaimed, 'Jai Dev?' We laughed still more loudly. 'You cheats!' uttered Ranjit while giving a forceful blow on my back. Then sarcastically added, 'It seems you take extra care of your own people.'

'For the time being your blow has made all and sundry equal.' said I:

"While Ranjit stayed in my room Vijay and Surinder Pandey came almost daily. Ranjit had come to discuss the possibility of freeing Bismil from jail. Having entrusted Bijay with responsibility of contacting Bismil and finalizing the plan, he went back to Punjab.

"After Ranjit had left I learnt that his actual name was Bhagat Singh. Earlier he had worked in the 'Pratap' with Vidyarthi ji. Before working in the 'Pratap' he had sustained himself by vending newspapers. It was revealed that an attempt to free Bismil from jail had to be abandoned halfway. (It could have been January-February, 1926.)

Many other companions of Bhagat Singh from Punjab had also accompanied him and Sukh Dev to participate in it. It was going to be another attempt in that direction.

"After about two months, Bhagat Singh returned. He, then, stayed with us for a long time. Vijay's contact with Bismil was very effective. Bismil had also agreed to the plan, but the date and time had not been finalised. The moment for decision was fast approaching. Meanwhile something happened; all contacts with Bismil, meetings and correspondence were stopped and he was placed under very strict vigil. It is not known why it so happened but this torpedoed our plans. Still Bijay continued his efforts.

"Bhagat Singh spent most of his time in reading. Victor Hugo, Tolstoy, Holocaine, Dostovesky and Bernard Shaw who were his favourite writers. He would often insist that we too should read those books. He would often relate the exploits of old revolutionaries such as *Kukas* exploits of *Ghadr* party, Kartar Singh, Sufi Amba Parsad and the stories of the bravery of *Babbar Akalis*. These stories made him emotional. There was a peculiar charm in his style of narration, because of which we often returned from college before classes were over."

Decorative Gem and the Foundation Stone

From the very beginning Jai Dev was stronger than me. He was enterprising. His hand was always quick in giving blows. For these very qualities Bhagat Singh had decided to include him in "Action Bismil". One day when he told me of the said decision, I felt annoyed with my frail body due to which I was not considered fit for the 'action'. This thought dealt a deep blow to me and after sometime I laid down on one side feigning asleep. Bhagat Singh knew that I was not sleep: For sometime he leafed through a book which was near him. Then shaking me by the shoulder called firmly, "Shiva".

"What is it?" I asked turning to him.

"May I ask one thing?"

"Yes, go ahead."

"Is the name of an individual bigger or the party work?"

"Party work," I replied.

"And that the party work may continue unhindered, our 'actions' may succeed, our ideas may reach the countrymen regularly, we may succeed in our freedom struggle at every stage, what is the first condition

for it?”

“A strong and comprehensive organization.” I answered.

“Organisation and publicity”, he quipped. “The country appreciates our work and our courage but masses are unable to establish direct linkage with us. We have not told them in clear terms so far what will be the shape of the freedom of which we talk: What kind of government would be formed after the British leave, and who would form it. To create a broad base for our struggle, we will have to take our struggle to the people because without popular support we cannot sustain it by killing a few English officers or informers as was being done in the past. So far we have remained indifferent to publicity and organization and concentrated just on ‘actions’. We will have to abandon this style of functioning. I want to leave you and Vijay behind for organization and publicity.” After a brief pause he said, “All of us are soldiers, and a soldier’s top priority is the battlefield. For this reason every one jumps on mere mention of ‘action’. Still then someone will have to abandon the passion for ‘actions’ for the sake of the movement. It is true that the glory of martyrdom falls on those who involve themselves in ‘actions’ or those who go to the gallows but in spite of that, their position is like that of the gem set on the main door of a building whose real value is nothing as compared to an ordinary foundation stone.”

I heard Bhagat Singh while lying down: He was sitting reclining by the wall and was talking as if thinking loudly. Sometimes the fingers of his right hand would move through my hair on the head. He would again speak gently in the same tone:

“Gems can add to the beauty of a building, can dazzle the eyes of the onlookers but they cannot become the foundation of the edifice. They cannot lend it longevity. They cannot bear it on their strong shoulders for centuries and keep it straight. Our movement has earned only gems so far; it has not gathered the foundation stones. For this reason we have not been able to build even the foundation so far, not to speak of the building, our sacrifices notwithstanding. We need foundation stones today.” Then after some pause said, “Sacrifice and renunciation also has two dimensions: One is to die with a bullet or at the gallows. It has more glitter but less difficulty. The second is to carry burden of the edifice for the whole life. During the ups and downs of the movement sometimes all the companions

depart in the hostile environment and one craves for a couple of words of solace. In such circumstances those who do not waver and do not deviate from their path, do not stagger under the weight of the edifice, whose shoulders do not bend, who kill themselves by inches and burn themselves out so that the flame of the lamp does not grow dim, the darkness may not engulf the desolate path: Is not the sacrifice and renunciation of such people more in comparison to the former?”

I looked at Bhagat Singh: He smiled and said, “You misunderstood me, therefore I told you all this. It is yet the beginning of our journey. If we misunderstand each other at this stage how shall we reach the goal?”⁶

The polarity of gem and a stone is a perennial phenomenon in social and political life and movements. Some of the roles that befall a person or chosen by oneself are by their very nature high profile, since they are in the limelight and visible to many; all these fall in the class of a gem. Juxtaposed to those, who fall in the category of stones, are the unsung heroes whose labour, much like the ordeal of a mother in the birth and bringing up of the child, remains hidden from public view but is indispensable for life.

Coincidentally or otherwise, the same metaphor is found in the long political poem ‘Dream Land’ by veteran *Ghadrite* and associate of Bhagat Singh, Baba Ram Saran Das Talwar, whose *Introduction* had been written by the martyr on 15 January 1931. This parallelism is all the more remarkable since philosophically Bhagat Singh and Baba Talwar stand diametrically opposite, the former being an avowed atheist and the latter atheist-mystic. ‘Dream Land’ was written while its author was undergoing transportation for life imprisonment as one of the leading figures of *Ghadr* party of 1914-15. He had been initially sentenced to death, along with 23 other comrades but the Viceroy, on his own, reviewed the sentences and commuted the death sentences of 17 of them to that of transportation for life. These *Ghadrites* of first case were then sent to Andamans where they suffered and struggled. He, along with other fellow *Ghadrites*, was repatriated to Madras jail in 1921 after spending 5 to 6 years in Andamans. The poem was written in September-October 1926 in Madras jail, that is about the same time when Bhagat Singh was sharing his views on this theme with Shiv Verma.

Bhagat Singh, in his *Introduction* alludes to the theme:

“....But the mysticism of the author is by no means ignorable or deplorable. It has its own beauty and charm. The ideas are encouraging. Just look:

“Be a foundation stone obscure,
and on thy breast cheerfully bear.
The architecture vast and huge
In sufferings find true refuge.
Envy not the plastered top stone
on which all worldly praise is thrown.”⁷

Freeing of Bismil



“After a few days of waiting for the latest developments regarding the plans to rescue Bismil, Vijay came and told us about the strictness and alertness of the jail officers. He proposed that we should abandon all the plans to free him at least for the time being. This news upset all plans of Bhagat Singh. All his dreams were shattered. The only thing which Bijoy brought for us was a poem written by Bismil: The theme of the poem displayed Bismil’s despair due to the delay in execution of our plans, in the diction of a love poem: A few lines of the poem were:

‘When the lover is dead, it’s no use if salutations come;
After the heart is devastated, what if his message comes!
When all the hopes are dashed, when all the ideas were obliterate;
If the messenger comes, it is useless!
O’ foolish heart! let you die now in the lane of the lover;
“If you help me after I fall, it is no use!
Would that we would see that scene in our life,
If someone with hellish gait comes to the grave, it is no use!
The state of Bismil was worth seeing on the last night,
If someone comes to the housetop by the morning, it is of no use.’

“Bhagat Singh took the piece of paper from Vijoy and read it. Bismil’s hint was clear. If you have to do something, do it soon: If afterwards you free the hanging body (of Bismil), what purpose would be served? The piece of paper fell down from Bhagat Singh’s hands. He placed his hands

on his forehead and slid by the wall like a lifeless statue. No more talk was possible for anyone of us that day. Bijoy and Surinder left. Bhagat Singh went towards the Ganges without uttering a word.

“When after waiting for him till late night, myself and Jai Dev went in search of him, he was found lying still on the river bank on cold sand listless with his hands on the forehead. We went near him and placing our hand on his shoulder asking to go to the room; he stood up listlessly and followed us like a shadow without uttering a word. Having recovered by the next day, he said, ‘By bowing before defeat, our path will be obstructed and instead of removing these obstacles, we will become obstacles ourselves.’ He called all the companions and dwelt on the problems of the organisation propaganda, the future strategy and went to Punjab promising an early return. This episode is of early 1927.”⁸

Shiv Verma concludes these ‘reminiscences’ thus:

“...They now belonged to the whole nation. When in the shouts of *Zindabad* with their names I see their portraits garlanded or when I hear a stranger humming a couplet of one of the numerous poems written on them, I hold my head high with pride...Even then one feels some pain, of the vacuum created in one’s life by the departure of one’s companions. When the old memories stir the mind one sings with the eminent poet Alam:

“Those who always lived in the eyes,
Now the ears listen their stories.”

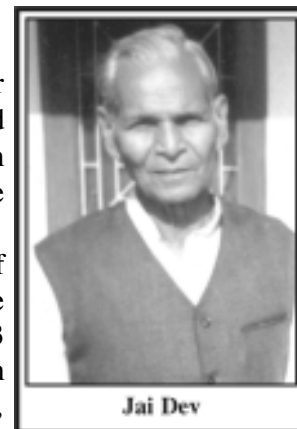
And then inner voice asks distractedly:

“O’ God! in which country these people live?”
(*Woh surten ilahi kis desh basti hain,
jinke niharne ko ankhen tarasti hain.*)⁹

Jai Dev Kapoor recalls

Jai Dev and Shiv Verma were together in DAV College, Kanpur as mentioned above. They were also together at Delhi on the crucial day of 8 April 1929 and were the co-organisers of that action.

This writer had the privilege of recording an interview of Jai Dev when he graced our residence at Ludhiana on 23 September 1979. Also with him was Kiron Das, younger brother of Martyr Jatin Das,



and (Prof.) Jagmohan Singh. We had all returned from Dina Nagar (Gurdaspur) after attending Golden Jubilee Celebrations of Jatin's martyrdom.

There is also an interview of Jai Dev by Dr. Chaman Lal (presently at the JNU, New Delhi) which was published in the "Indian Express" in 1988: Its opening para reads:

"Jai Dev Kapoor is keeping memories of those days alive as of yesterday, even after 60 years of that brave saga of Indian revolutionary struggle against British imperialism. Jai Dev was born in 1908 in Hardoi in a Punjabi family, which had migrated from Amritsar. He was the only child of his parents.

"Jai Dev vividly remembers his first meeting with Bhagat Singh in 1926 at Kanpur. Bhagat Singh had come to visit him with a reference from a party contact in Delhi and stayed with him for many days. Both were assigned to take part in an action proposed for the release of Kakori case convicts. The rescue operation did not materialise, but both became friends...Bhagat Singh was a very lively man, fond of singing Punjabi songs, seeing films and both often went for boating in the river."¹⁰

Interview (on 23 September 1979, by the writer)

"How did you join the party?"

"Even while I was a student of High School at Hardoi, I heard about the arrests and prosecution of the revolutionaries of Kakori case. It aroused feelings of sympathy and respect for these patriots while evoking anger against the foreign rulers. Thus even before I came to Kanpur to join the DAV college for my Intermediate (Science) studies, I had already been inspired by these feelings.

"Once at Kanpur, it occurred to me that I should get in touch with the persons associated with the 'Pratap' since the articles on martyrs occasionally published in this weekly had left its mark on me. I felt that perhaps some way may be found to move forward by meeting the newspaper's staff. From that source, what I could gather was sufficient to inspire me to pledge my life and ambitions for the cause of the revolutionary movement. I shared my feelings with Shiv Verma, my childhood friend from Hardoi and he also concurred. This is how we both got initiated into the party.

"Our comrade in Delhi, Kashi Ram wrote that one of his friends,

a Sikh youngman, Sardar Balwant Singh, shall be coming to stay with us. 'He is a nice boy. He wants to meet you and shall be glad to meet you.'

"We, on our part, were over-cautious and even nervous to learn this, since indiscriminate police raids and arrests were the order of the day. The suspicion that was troubling us was, that our Delhi friend may have been entrapped by the C.I.D. So we removed all reading material of political nature and retained only text books in our room. I was deemed to be a simpleton, interested only in games or studies, nothing else. So we decided to put him up with Shiv Verma since I had been given two firearms by the party, which I had to conceal at all costs. So I habitually posed as an innocent boy interested only in studies. We spent a lot of time with Bhagat Singh discussing topics like Ireland's struggle for freedom as also our own freedom struggle. I used to be just a passive listener posing as if I was not interested in such things, being from a poor family, who shall first get educated, then would see what to do; nothing beyond that at present. Bhagat Singh on knowing it often felt annoyed but I had my own compulsions in posing like that.

"One day I told Sardar that he had to stay alone in the room as I



had to attend a *mundun* ceremony at my sister's house. He said, 'I too shall go with you.' I tried to put him off taking the plea of traditions of privacy enjoined upon the lady members in our families. 'They are tradition-bound people; you shall get bored there.' But he insisted that he must go with me and shall keep on just sitting where I sit. More I tried to put him off, more he insisted on accompanying me. By now, about one hour was gone but I could not succeed in shaking him off. Now Bhagat Singh, opened up by saying that 'I know what you are and what

are you involved in, I too am proceeding where you are!' I shot back the question, 'Where I am going?' 'I will tell everything to you now. I also know that you have two pistols, which if you like, you can keep both or give one to me.' Then I tried to guess that whenever I used to be away, Bhagat Singh would also be visiting and meeting my contacts; and unless he was in touch with my contact, he could not have learnt about the weapons, since he also knew that one of these weapons was

‘Webley Scott’ and also about the number of cartridges with me. Little doubt was left now about all this. The masks which we were wearing were off, and we became loving friends. We both had in fact to go for the same action, namely, to attempt rescuing Kakori case comrades. I had been given the direction in this regard for which I had feigned a visit to my sister, while he too was to reach the same point, at the same time!”¹¹

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- 11 Original preserved.

5

NAUJWAN BHARAT SABHA

The birth pangs —

Recalls Comrade Ram Chandra, the founder President:—

Idea of youth organisation:

One day Bhagat Singh came to me and I discussed my difficulty with him. I sought his help in the organisation of the labour. He told me that I had started the wrong way. I should have started with the organisation of young educated men and with increased manpower from the youth, I should have undertaken the work of organisation of the labour.

In these days Bhagwati Charan and myself were studying French from Piaré Lal Duggal at the house of Bhagwati Charan. During discussion one day Bhagwati also advised me to first take up the cause of youth organisation. The suggestion from these two appealed to me. The proposal seemed to be practical and necessary. But my hands were full with the work of labour organisation. So on another occasion I asked Bhagat Singh to contact our other college fellows. They alone, I felt, were the right material for us. He agreed. After about a month or two Principal Chhabil Das told me that a meeting of National College graduates, of teachers and that of students had been called by Bhagat Singh in the National College and as per my promise with Bhagat Singh, I should attend it positively.

Accordingly a number of National College graduates, teachers and students met in a class room of the National College. We discussed the need of forming a youngmens’ organisation. Everyone was in its favour as we all were



disappointed with the Congress leadership. A decision was taken to form the organisation at the earliest. There is no record available but I remember Principal Chhabil Das, Master Pars Ram, Master Guru Dutt, Bhagwati Charn, Bhagat Singh, Sukh Dev, Jai Dev, Babu Singh, Ganpat Rai, Jaswant Singh, Som Dev, Banarsi Das and myself were present, besides others which I do not recall now.

After about another month another meeting was convened to consider further steps for the formation of the organisation. In a happy discussion we unanimously decided that the name of the organisation should be Young India Association. This was based on our study of European History, especially Young Ireland, Young Turkey and Young Italy movements and Russian Revolution in which the youth played commendable role. Thereafter meetings began to be held to discuss Articles of the Constitution of the Association. Then came the question of aims and objects of the association. Here too we were unanimous that the object of youngmen was the achievement of complete Independence as against the Congress object of Dominion Status. The next item was the question of means for the attainment of complete independence. Here too we unanimously declared our belief in using all possible means for the attainment of complete independence.

Thus we bade goodbye to the Congress creed of Dominion Status and through legitimate and peaceful means We ridiculed the word legitimate as we could not conceive any means which enabled us to achieve independence to be illegitimate. These three decisions having been made we began discussing outlines of the Constitution of the Association: I vividly remember that to draft the constitution we held a number of meetings in Parimahal, Lahore.

Discussion on Name

This detailed drafting was a bit difficult. I do not remember the names of all the members who took interest in drafting. But I remember that Bhagat Singh and myself were always there. We both laboured over the constitution more than others. In the preliminary meetings we had passed the first three clauses regarding name, aims and objects and the means to achieve the

aims and objects unanimously. Then came the question of the language of the conduct of business. Following the example of Ireland we unanimously decided that all our work and meetings were to be conducted in *Hindustani*. At once my thought went to the name of the organisation which was in English. I, therefore, said that the name Young India Association should be dropped and instead a *Hindustani* equivalent should be adopted. Bhagat Singh opposed this and favoured the name Young India Association since it was connected with international freedom struggles, struggle of Irish, Italian and Turkish youngmen and inspired us for an uncompromising struggle. I said obviously these struggles inspired us and would continue to inspire us in future, but the name in the Indian language would not by itself delink us from international movements. I further said that while we had to conduct all proceedings in *Hindustani*, the English name would look odd and incongruous. We wanted a mass organisation and mass membership and the uneducated people would not be able to remember and understand the English name.

“Ultimately it was decided that the organization be named *Naujwan Bharat Sabha*. There were no differences in, or objections to other clauses and a constitution was finally adopted. Bhagat Singh, as General Secretary was entrusted with the work of printing of letter-heads. With a beautiful block he got printed the letter-heads bearing both the names *Naujwan Bharat Sabha* and Young India Association. Smilingly, he came and showed it to me adding that there should be ‘comradely accommodation!’ I instantly agreed and he felt pleased. He had done another nice thing. He got printed a motto also bearing the letters ‘S.S.S.’ denoting ‘Service, Sacrifice and Suffering’. I welcomed this too and we began to work.

“*Naujwan Bharat Sabha* now began its activities in different cities of Punjab. Bhagat Singh procured a magic lantern also, which was used to show pictures of the martyrs to the audience.”¹

C.I.D. Report

“In this regard, C.I.D. file no. 9349 relating to Bhagat Singh reads:

“In the spring of 1926 a society known as the Young India Association or *Naujwan Bharat Sabha* was formed at Lahore

by a group of extremists. The avowed objects of this Society are to prepare young men for political service, to popularize the use of 'khaddar' and to work for Hindu-Muslim unity, but its proceedings at its weekly meetings show that it was thoroughly impregnated with revolutionary ideas. This society will require careful watching, as it is likely to be used as a cover for revolutionary activity and to form the hub of a revolutionary group. Bhagat Singh is the secretary, and his principal associates are, for the most part, members of the association...."²

First Conference

"In 1928, the Punjab Congress decided to hold a Provincial Conference on *Baisahki* at Amritsar, I told Bhagat Singh that it was time that we should also hold our Provisional Conference at Amritsar. Bhagat Singh agreed... I told him that the Sabha had caught the imagination of the youth. So if a few of us come out to announce our conference, it would be held successfully. I advised him to go to Amritsar and contact people. Further, on account of our socialist views, persons associated with '*Kirti*' are also close to us. You have also been writing for '*Kirti*'. Thereupon Bhagat Singh visited Amritsar and met '*Kirti*' leaders and others. It was finally announced that Provincial *Naujwan Bharat Sabha* Conference shall be held on 13-14 April 1928 at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar alongside the Congress Conference.

Three important resolutions passed by this Conference were:

- 1) Change in the object from 'achievement of complete independence by all possible means' to 'achievement of a completely Independent Sovereign Republic of peasants and workers by all possible means.
- 2) Demand to substitute Tricolour flag by Red flag, and
- 3) To treat religion as a personal matter, separate from politics.

It is pertinent to mention here about an activity of the Sabha in consonance with its secular attitude: It was that inter-communal common dinners were to be held in which Hindus,

Muslims and Sikhs would dine jointly sharing the same food.³

Punjab Government's Report on the Conference reads:-

"The same day (13-14 April 1928) Punjab *Naujwan Bharat Sabha* Conference was held parallel to the Punjab Provincial Congress Conference at the same place i.e. Jallianwala Bagh. The organizers and the audience were practically the same in both the Conferences.

"...Laudatory references were made to the martyrs hanged in conspiracy cases including the *Babbar Akalis* and Kakori heroes. It was decided to form the *Sabha* at the centre and in important towns and villages.

"The *Sabha* has been resuscitated after a year's inactivity and has during the last few weeks, held thoroughly objectionable meetings at Lahore. Its objects are apparently political but it undoubtedly provides cover for revolutionary activity and it has the support of the Punjabi radical agitators. Another decision containing the seeds of agitation was contained in a resolution to resort to passive resistance if necessary, to get the Arms Act repealed.

"The proceedings of the 'National Week' have clarified the situation: On the one hand there was definitely increased chances of trouble from a comparatively small but very virulent group, the members of which are in favour of methods of violence. On the other hand, it was now clear that some sort of harmony was been established among certain extreme members of the Congress, Akali elements, the '*Kirti*' and *Kisan* group of Sikh communists and the Sikh Students Revolutionary Association. The object was to recreate the conditions of 1919 by all means, and attempts will be made to stir up the masses.

"A sub-committee of the Sabha was formed to draft a new constitution to organize the Provincial Organization at the Centre and branches in different localities."⁴

The Manifesto

Manifesto of the *Naujwan Bharat Sabha*, was printed and published by B.C. Vohra, B.A., Sabha's Propaganda Secretary, at Arorbars Press, Lahore.

It was timed to be available on the occasion of first Punjab Provincial Conference of the Sabha at Amritsar on 13-14 April 1928. It was printed on 6 April 1928. In effect, it reflected the outlook of the team of revolutionaries working simultaneously on the one hand as a

secret revolutionary party and from the public platform of the Sabha, on the other.

Glimpses

“Is it not really degrading for us, with Guru Gobind Singh, Shivaji and Hari Singh as our heroes, to be told that we are incapable of defending ourselves?

“While, we Indians, what are we doing? A branch of *peepal* tree is cut and religious feelings of the Hindus are injured.” Same is the case of other communities.

“Religious superstitions and bigotry are a great hindrance in our progress.

“Having achieved nothing, we are not prepared to sacrifice anything for any achievement; our leaders are fighting among themselves to decide what will be the share of each community in the *hoped achievement*.

“The future programme of preparing the country will begin with the motto ‘Revolution by the masses for the masses’.

“Do not forget your Martyrs. Kartar Singh (Sarabha) was a youngman. Yet in his teen, when he came forth to serve his country, he ascended the scaffold smiling and echoing, ‘Bande Matram’.

“The penultimate paragraph contains a call to Punjabi youth : Young Punjabis! The youth of other provinces are working tremendously in their respective spheres, why should we be lagging behind?’ ‘Because we are lacking in organization and discipline.’ ‘service’ — ‘suffering’ — ‘sacrifice’ the three S’s be our guiding lights!

“Its concluding paragraph states:-

“Remember, the making of nations requires self-sacrifice of thousands of unknown men and women who care more for the country than for their own comfort or interests or for the lives of those whom they love.”

“6.4.1928

Bande Matram”⁵

Aims and Objects of the Sabha

The membership form of the Sabha issued in June, 1928 spells out its aims and objects, is on police record. The objects were:

- (a) to establish a completely independent republic of labourers and peasants of the whole of India,
- (b) to infuse a sprit of patriotism into the hearts of the youth of

the country in order to establish a united Indian nation,

- (c) to express sympathy with and to assist the economic, industrial and social movements which, while being free from communal sentiments, are intended to take us nearer to our ideal, namely the establishment of a completely independent republic of labourers and peasants,

and (d) to organize the labourers and peasants.

“It is obvious from the above that the Sabha is not merely a cultural and non-political association. Its aims are definitely political and this has been adequately corroborated by the many violent and seditious speeches made at a number of public meetings organized by the society. The leader of the Sabha like Kedar Nath Sehgal, Dr. Satyapal, etc., make no pretext. Their ultimate aim is to incite the youth of the Punjab and elsewhere to direct action in order to overthrow the Government.”⁶

Sabha’s activities

Celebrating Martyrs’ Day

Naujwan Bharat Sabha was doing its utmost to openly propagate revolution. For this purpose, they decided to observe the Martyrdom Anniversary of the 19½ year old young hero of 1914-15, Kartar Singh Sarabha, along with the exhibition of his photograph at Bradlaugh Hall, Lahore. This celebration was, for all practical purposes a call to youngmen to prepare for an armed revolution. The function was planned in a very touching manner. Bhagat Singh had managed to obtain a small photograph of martyr Kartar Singh. From this photograph a big sized portrait was got prepared by Bhagwati Bhai. This portrait was displayed prominently on the dais covered with a curtain of white ‘khaddar’. Durga Bhabhi (wife of Bhagwati) and Sushila Didi sanctified it by sprinkling blood taken from their hands. The keynote address on the occasion was delivered by Bhagwati Charan.

Interestingly a photograph of Kartar Singh Sarabha was also recovered from the house of Bhagat Singh during search of his (father’s) house on 2 May 1929 by the police.

“On the political plane, Sabha made a radical departure from the weak kneed Congress leadership, whose only ‘weapon’ was an appeal to the *Mai Baap Sarkar*. But radical Congressmen of those days like Dr Satya Pal, Dr Kitchlew, Kedar Nath Sehgal, Lala Pindi Das fully

shared the sentiments of the *Sabha*. As for Lala Lajpat Rai, by then he had turned communal and was an active *Hindu Mahasabhi*.

“*Sabha* workers like Bhagat Singh, Bhagwati Charan, Sukh Dev, Dhanwantri, Ehsan Ilahi, took care of the venue, agenda of our public meetings as also the task of carrying, spreading, and winding up of the ground mats (*daris*) for the audience.

“*Sabha*’s activities went far beyond radical politics, and it had an equally vital social agenda. Being conscious of the social divides among the masses based on religion and caste it made concerted efforts to create a harmonious social environment. For sensitising the people about the dangers of communal divide and the pernicious caste system, public dinners were organised where same food was served on to all on dried leaves, while being seated on ground mats.

“The *Sabha* led a sustained propaganda campaign against communalism, but unlike Congress, instead of relying on joint shouting of ‘Sat Sri Akal’, ‘Allah-hu-Akbar’, ‘Har Har Mahadev’ it relied on slogans like ‘Bande Matram’, ‘Inqilab Zindabad’, ‘Hindustan Zindabad’. So also the *Sabha* campaigned against dogmatism and superstitions which held back the people to move forward with confidence in themselves. For this a very practical approach was adopted: A Hindu speaker would speak against dogmas and superstitions among Hindus and a Muslim would expose the hollowness of such malpractices among Muslim.⁷

Untouchability

Bhagat Singh, though fully wedded to Marxian theory of classes and class struggles, had the moral courage and intellectual honesty to admit that caste tyranny stood in the way of social-political advancement and needs be tackled side by side.

Hence fight against this pernicious system, found due place in activities of Naujwan Bharat Sabha. Bhagat Singh was foremost in this realm; in his Punjabi article “Achhoot da Sawaal” published in *Kirti* in June 1928, i.e., two months after the publication of *Sabha’s Manifesto* he wrote:

Just imagine how shameful it is! Even a dog can sit in our lap, it can also move freely in kitchen but if a fellow human touches you, your *dharma* is endangered. So much so, even a reputed social reformer like Pandit Malviya ji, known for his soft corner for the untouchables,

first agrees to be publicly garlanded by a sweeper, but then afterwards regards himself to be polluted till he bathes and washes those clothes. How ironical! In the temples meant for worshipping *God, who lives in us all*, if a poor man enters, it gets defiled and God gets annoyed. When this is the state of affairs within the Hindu fold, does it behove us to quarrel and fight in the name of the brotherhood? Above all, this kind of approach to the question amounts to an ingratitude of the highest degree; those who provide us the comforts by doing menial jobs for us, we shun them. We could worship even animals, but would not tolerate fellow humans to sit beside us.

Here, the basic question arises, how precisely can we solve this tangle? The answer is quite obvious; above all, it needs to be settled for good, that all humans are equal without distinctions of birth or vocation. In other words that since someone is born in a poor sweepers’ family, he shall continue cleaning toilets all his life and thus get deprived of all chances of progress in life, is sheer nonsense. Historically speaking, when our Aryan ancestors nurtured these practices of discrimination towards this strata of society, shunning all human contact with them by labeling them as menials, and assigning all the degrading jobs to them, they also, naturally started worrying about a revolt against this system. “All this is the result of your past sins; What can be done about it? Bear it silently!” and with such kinds of sleeping pills, they were able to buy peace for quite some time. All the same they were guilty of a great sin on this account, since this amounted to the negation of core human values like self-esteem and self-reliance, a grossly cruel conduct by all means. Yet present is the moment of its atonement.

In a broader social perspective, untouchability had a pernicious side-effect; people in general got used to hating the jobs which were otherwise vital for life. We treated the weavers who provided us cloth as untouchable. In U.P. water carriers were also considered untouchables. All this caused tremendous damage to our progress by undermining the dignity of labour, especially manual labour. We have thus to accept it once for all, that in order to move forward we have to give up either considering or calling them untouchables.

Everything else shall fall in place by itself.

In this regard, a strategy adopted by *Naujwan Bharat Sabha* and the Youth conference is, most apt-to seek forgiveness from those brethren whom we have been calling untouchables, by treating them as our fellow beings, without making them go through conversion

ceremonies of Sikhism Islam or Hinduism, by accepting food / water from their hands. On the other hand quarrelling among ourselves in the race to win them over, without restoring to them their human dignity is futile.

But the moment we went to villages with our message of human equality and brotherhood mentioned above, Government agents started inciting the *Jat* community saying that this would embolden these menials to refuse serving them. This was sufficient to provoke the *Jats*, to oppose our efforts in the right direction.

But the upper castes should also realise that their own status in life cannot change for the better as long they persist in considering these people as inferior, calling them menials, and keeping them under their heels. It is argued that they are unclean. The harsh truth is that they are poor; remove their poverty and they shall be clean. Don't we find that the poor even among the upper castes are no less unclean? Besides doing unclean jobs is not bad; for example mothers perform all the unclean duties for their children. Do they become unclean?

"Those who would be free must themselves strike the first blow." It must be kept in mind that every one belonging to the privileged class, strives to enjoy his own rights, but would try his utmost to keep oppressing those below him, and keeping the underprivileged under his heel. Thus, might is held to be right. Waste no time and unite to stand on your own feet and challenge the existing order of society. Let it then be seen as to who dares to deny your due. Do not be at the mercy of others and have no illusions about them. Be on guard so as not to fall in the trap of officialdom, because far from being your ally it seeks to make you dance to its own tunes. The capitalist bureaucratic combine is, truly speaking responsible for your oppression and poverty. Hence always shun it. Be on guard about its tricks. This is then the way out. You are the real working class. Workers unite – you have nothing to lose but your chains. Arise and rebel against the existing order. Gradualism and reformism shall be of no avail to you. Start a revolution from a social agitation and gird up your loins for political and economic revolution. You and you alone are the pillars of the nations and its core strength. Awake, O sleeping lions! Rebel, raise the banner of revolt.⁸

Decision to Create Students' Organization:

Ram Chander writes, "A few days after the Amritsar Conference, we held thorough discussions to review the situation, it was agreed that Bhagawati Charan and Bhagat Singh would take care of creating students' organization and I would look only to the work of *Naujwan Bharat Sabha* and peasants' and workers' organization.

"Secret work

"An action-oriented cell would be separately maintained for militant activities. It would be headed by Sukh Dev, Bhagwati Charan and Bhagat Singh. This cell would remain outwardly separate, although all the time receiving succour and support from the *Sabha*. My secret co-operation would always be there. This cleared our ideas and set us on a well thought-out comprehensive plan of organization. After long discussions, we decided that the secret organization, while keeping its separate existence, would recruit its members from the *Sabha*, working class, peasantry, retired military men and students. It will carry on propaganda for militant actions separately and not involve the *Sabha* openly. The action party would take advantage of political occasions and resort to militant propaganda and actions with a view to arouse the people. The *Sabha* would provide shelter to such comrades and help in their defence. But it would keep itself on the fringe, keeping its separate existence so as to escape police action and to maintain its separate organisational structure. It would carry on the organization of the youth, the peasants and workers and propaganda for socialism.

"Thus started the active organization of students with clearly defined aim to mobilise the students' conscious organization for propaganda as well as militant revolutionary work."⁹

Dhanwantri, new General Secretary

"One day in October 1928, Bhagat Singh came to me in Pari Mahal in Lahore and said he wanted to talk to me.... 'I have much other work to do' said he. 'I cannot work as General Secretary of *Naujwan Bharat Sabha*: Choose a new man for the job and take full charge of the work of the *Sabha*.' "I shall continue the work as President but being a journalist and labour worker, I can not give full time myself, said I. I want an active comrade like you in your place as General Secretary. Of course, if you have a plan to devote more time to the other side, I shall try to give more time to the *Sabha*. But a good and active General Secretary certainly would be needed", I added.

“Choose whomsoever you like.”

‘I chose Dhanwantri’ and Bhagat Singh said he would bring him along the next day to finalise the arrangement.

“Next day, he brought Dhanwantri, who promised to devote full time to the *Sabha*’s work. Till then, I did not know that Dhanwantri had also joined the secret wing and I was being made to commit myself to carry on all work under all circumstances. As events showed, Dhanwantri too attended more to secret work than that of the *Sabha*, but he was so sincere, so loving and so sweet that his smile would make me forget all his lapses.

“One day Dhanwantri gave me a jolt when he said, ‘Comrade Sahib! resign from your newspaper job and devote more time yourself. I cannot work as a donkey running all the time. Take off some of my load and if you cannot do that, have another man to do the General Secretary’s job.’

“Trying to placate him, I said, “I will do as much work and devote as much time as you like, but be at peace.” Thus began a new stage.

“However, the position had changed; with Bhagat Singh, I had my arguments and priorities. And he used to adjust according to my demands. This liberty was gone in case of Dhanwantri. He functioned according to his engagements in secret work. I had to adjust according to his desires.¹⁰

“On the Peasants’ front

“After Naujwan Bharat Sabha Conference in April 1928, the Sabha and the *Kirti Kisan* Party jointly started agitation among the *Kisans* for securing a waiver in land revenue and water charges on account of drought and failure of wheat crop. Progressive Congressmen also joined us. The Government got nervous. It yielded before the agitation and announced land revenue and water charges concession.

“The Sabha in June 1928 also actively supported the Bardoli Kisan Satyagraha and treated it as Kisan revolt against British exploitation. It collected and remitted funds collected to aid the *satyagraha*.

“(The) *Kirtis* also joined Naujwan Sabha enthusiastically and in appreciation Sohan Singh Josh was elected President of our Amritsar branch.

“Second Provincial Conference

“In about August 1928 the Kirti party suggested that during the next Punjab Provincial Congress Conference, which was to be held at Lyallpur in the last days of September 1928, second *Naujwan Bharat Sabha* Congress and first Provincial Kirti Kisan Conference be held simultaneously. As our relations with the *Kirti* people were very cordial, we readily agreed. It was decided that I would act as Chairman of the Reception Committee of the Conference and read Chairman’s address while Comrade S.A. Dange would preside over the Conference. Besides Spratt and some other communist leaders would also attend the conference. The arrangements to bring Dange and Spratt were to be made by *Kirti* people. Unfortunately at the last moment, it was learnt that Dange and Spratt would not be coming. So a last minute decision was made to request Principal Chhabil Das to preside, who gladly agreed to do so. Like Amritsar Conference, Reception Committee of the Lyallpur Congress Committee whole-heartedly cooperated with us and we held our Conferences by turn on the same pandal.”¹¹

“Bhagwati — A C.I.D. Agent

“Tragically, just after 5 months of its manifesto’s publication, Bhagwati, the author was dubbed as a C.I.D. man, that too by none else than Prof. Jai Chander Vidyalankar, the ‘Guru’ to all these youngmen just out of malice and jealousy and it was only in November 1929 that he managed to get over this cobweb of suspicion whence he finally was able to meet Azad at Kanpur. Ironically all this while, i.e., from September 1928 to November 1929 the party continued to rely on him and his wife for vital support while risking their own lives.”¹²

Boycott of the *Simon Commission: 1928*

“An all-White commission under the Chairmanship of Sir John Simon was to tour India, meet Indian leaders and submit its recommendations to the British Government regarding Indians’ capability for self-government. This clearly was an insult to Indians in general, and freedom fighters in particular, and highlighted the reluctance of the British Government to part with power. Indians reacted strongly against the Commission and declared its boycott and decided to stage black-flag demonstrations on its arrival everywhere, with the slogan “Simon, Go back.” On the first day of its arrival on the Indian

sea-shore there were spontaneous mass demonstrations and strikes all over the country to give vent to the anger. In the name of law and order, large number of arrests were made all over India. In Lahore too, houses of *Naujwan Sabha* members were searched in advance and besides others, Lahore students too were arrested for giving a call for *hartal*.

“October 30, 1928 was fixed by the Government for the visit of the Commission to Lahore. In defiance of the Government ban, a huge meeting was held on 29th October at Lahore to announce a hostile reception to the Commission on the next day. Madan Mohan Malviya and Lajpat Rai had also arrived. Early in the morning of 30th October, Kedar Nath Sehgal and a large number of Congressmen and *Naujwans* arrived at Lala Lajpat Rai’s house to request both the leaders to lead the protest demonstration. Both the leaders gladly agreed and led the procession of about 25,000 *Naujwan Sabha* member and Congressmen to Lahore Railway Station, where the Commission was expected to arrive. Government had set up barricades to prevent the public from reaching the station precincts and a very large number of policemen had been deployed to hold back the public. Leaders and processionists took their stand on the other side of the barricades. Leaders were keeping the demonstrators under control. To vent their feelings they shouted ‘Simon, Go back.’ Loud shouts upset the police Superintendent Mr. Scott. He ordered a lathi charge. Lathis began to rain indiscriminately. Over-enthusiastic police officers and policemen did not spare even Lala ji. A lathi hit Lala ji’s causing injuries to him. Seeing the disrespect of their leader, Dr. Satyapal and others rushed forward to protect Lala ji and Dr. Gopi Chand then stepped forward to protect Dr. Satyapal. In spite of the provocation, huge crowd remained restrained and peaceful.

“Later, unparalleled protests rocked the country when on the 17th November, Lala Lajpat Rai died in his Lahore home presumably on account of police inflicted injuries and the trauma. But in the evening of day of the lathi charge itself, he had roared in a public meeting that “Every blow hurled on us today is a nail in the coffin of British empire. Words that proved truly prophetic!”¹⁴

Kakori Martyrs’ Day

On 16 December 1928, i.e. less than 24 hours before the

murder of Saunders, the Kakori day was observed by the Sabha. “A grand meeting was held for its observance in the Bradlaugh Hall in Lahore. This meeting was held in an atmosphere of resentment and indignation that had been created by the Sabha’s continuous propaganda after the martyrdom of Lala Lajpat Rai. An unusually large number of students also joined in. Amongst others, Mehta Anand Kishore, Munshi Ahmad Din and I (Ram Chander) addressed the audience. The fiery speeches narrating the execution of Kakori revolutionaries literally electrified the gathering. Later the police viewed this meeting as preparation and incitement for Saunders’ murder.”¹⁷

Second Naujwan Bharat Sabha Conference

“While the Government thought that it had crippled the Sabha by arresting me (Ram Chander), Kedar Nath Sehgal and Majid — the leading figures, we had already done our work by preparing the next line of leaders; Dhanwantri replaced Bhagat Singh and Comrade Ram Kishan took over as president.

“To proclaim that we were alive and kicking, second Annual Conference was held from February 22-24, 1929 at Lahore, wherein Sohan Singh ‘Josh’, the leader of Kirti Kisan Party was elected President. The Punjab agitators attended in full force. The proceedings of the Conference reflected the revolutionary and anti-British spirit of the Sabha, but the speakers were careful to confine themselves within law.”¹⁵

Comrade Ram Chandra was arrested and sent to jail and he went on a hunger strike along with other revolutionaries, which was reported by the *Tribune*, dated 24 August, 1929 as under:

Hunger strike day by day

Till the day, Bhagat Singh and Dutt had been on 71 days’ hunger-strike. Other Conspiracy Case prisoners had been on 41 days’ strike. Baba Arur Singh 32 days, Kabul Singh 31 days and Ram Chandra, Ahmad Din and Gopal Singh on 21 days’ hunger-strike. Hunger-strike terminated in Lahore on 2.9.1929 and Mianwali on 3.9.1929.

“The Government tried to curb the Sabha in our absence and started arresting our workers. Hakim Sikander Hayat Khan, Chairman, Reception Committee of the proposed Sabha Conference was arrested under Section 124-A of IPC. After his arrest, he also arrived in Mianwali jail.”¹⁶

Third Sabha Conference

“It was held at Amritsar from August 9-11, 1929 despite repression. Master Mota Singh who was to preside over the Conference was also arrested beforehand, but was replaced by Amir Alam Khan of Rawalpindi. The President elect arrived at Amritsar on the morning of 9 August and was taken in procession from the railway station to the city. About 3,000 persons attended the first meeting and 6,000 on the second day. This meeting was also attended by Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru.

“Frequent references were made to the great sacrifice of Bhagat Singh and Dutt.”¹⁷

Sabha Banned

Ever since 1928, the Secretary of State at London, the Government of India and the Government of Punjab had been continuously discussing the question of how to deal with the Sabha's challenge.

File no. 130/1930 and KW deals exclusively with this issue. The title of the file is : “*Activities of the Naujwan Bharat Sabha; Political situation in Punjab.*”

The file consists of 116 pages. Page No. 5 of the file reads:

“From its very birth, the activities of the *Naujwan Bharat Sabha* have been of a most objectionable nature and there has been a very thin disguise, if any, as to their subversive objects even in the beginning; and although it did suffer some setbacks on account of the violent and unorthodox changes which its members presented to the public somewhat prematurely, as also for having made some personal attacks, yet the central idea with which the Sabha was formed was never lost sight of. On the other hand, this idea was, in spite of the occasional difficulties and disappointments which the Sabha had to face, kept in view with persistence and determination. The counter propaganda was not able to harm the *Naujwan Bharat Sabha* seriously, and it went on advancing from stage to stage and although its membership never increased very much, it was successful in enlisting such elements — youth and students for instance — as it required for the anarchical and revolutionary work which was the real aim of its founder and his close associates.”¹⁸

Says Ram Chandar, “Then on 23rd June 1929, the Government

declared a number of organizations in Punjab including the Sabha, Kirti Kisan Sabha and Congress War Councils unlawful....Our first reaction was to announce the formation of a new organisation called the Hind *Naujwan Sabha* with Babu Singh as its President. Most of the *Naujwan Sabha* members were declared to be its members. Its aim was to work for India's freedom. The Government at once arrested all of us, and put us on trial, but we were all acquitted. As a reaction to this whimsical prosecution, we decided to resort to open *Satyagrah* and holding of meetings.¹⁹

Unlawful Sabha gives lead

“Following the rejection of appeal on behalf of Bhagat Singh, Sukh Dev and Raj Guru by Privy Council at London on 12 February 1931, Sabha, under the banner of ‘Bhagat Singh Appeal Committee’ started its campaign. A meeting for this purpose was held at night in the office of daily ‘Vir Bharat’ at Chamberlain Road, Lahore. The plan was to obtain signatures of millions, demanding the withdrawal of death sentences and thus telling the Government that its conduct in sticking to execution of the judgement was against the expressed opinion of millions.

“The fortnightly secret report of Punjab Government took notice of it and had observed: ‘The committee is avowedly a camouflaged revival of the *Naujwan Bharat Sabha*, the communistic and anti-communal tenets of which are strikingly displayed in the statement which Bhagat Singh has, at the eleventh hour, submitted by way of petition of mercy.’

“It was declared that on 17 February 1931, the memorial will be submitted to the Viceroy and ‘Bhagat Singh Day’ shall be observed throughout the Province.”

Naujwan Sabha's Lonely Fight

To mention a few instances:

“On February 13, 1931 Amritsar Naujwan Sabha in a meeting held under the Presidentship of Baba Gurdit Singh demanded that all political persons be released by any second round table Conference.

“After the Gandhi-Irwin Pact on March 4, 1931 all restrictions on Congress, Sabha and Kirti Kisan Sabha were removed. The Sabha began to function under its own name.

“On 17th March, Sabha called upon its branches to hold meetings and demonstrations on 21st March for seeking commutation of death sentences of Bhagat Singh, Raj Guru and Sukh Dev. By then it was learnt that the three heroes were to be hanged on 24th March. It caused a great commotion making this day a day of vigorous protests. On 23rd March a protest hartal was observed in Lahore and a mass demonstration was organized by the Sabha. A procession which ultimately approximated 15,000 people including 2000 ladies reached Municipal Garden outside Mori Gate to hold a protest meeting.

“In short, all struggles, agitation, meetings and processions were managed and led by *Naujwan Bharat Sabha* and were repeated in the rest of India.

“Afterwards too, the Sabha in its conference held on 16 October 1933 demanded that the Government should not send political prisoners to Andamans.

Again it was banned on 23 July 1934. Finally then *Naujwan Sabha* ceased to exist, only to be born again like a phoenix with a new name, Socialist Party.²⁰

References:

- 1 Comrade Ram Chandra: *Naujawan Bharat Sabha and Hindustan Socialist Republican Association /Army (H.S.R.A.)*, Ed. Malwinder Jit Singh Waraich, Unistar Books Pvt. Ltd., Chandigarh, 2007, pp. 13-17.
- 2 File No. C.I.D. 9349 S.B.C.
- 3 Comrade Ram Chandra, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-40.
- 4 *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.
- 5 *A Biography of Bhagwati Charan Vohra and Durga Bhabhi*, Malwinder Jit Singh Waraich, Unistar Publication Pvt. Ltd., Chandigarh, 2012, pp. 186-191.
- 6 File No. 130/1930. National Archives of India. p.1.
- 7 Yashpal: *Sinhavalokan* (Hindi), Lokbharati Prakashan, Allahabad, 1994, pp. 75-78.
- 8 Bhagat Singh: *Achhoot da Sawal* (Punjabi), *Kirti*, June 1928.
- 9 Comrade Ram Chandra, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-50.
- 10 *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.
- 11 *Ibid.*, pp. 56-58.

- 12 *A Biography of Bhagwati Charan Vohra and Durga Bhabhi, op. cit.*, pp. 50-52.
 - 13 *Ibid.*, p. 155.
 - 14 *Ibid.*, pp. 63-66.
 - 15 *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.
 - 16 *Ibid.*, pp. 95-96.
 - 17 *Ibid.*, pp. 104-105.
 - 18 File No. 130/1930 Kw, p. 5.
 - 19 *Ibid.*, p. 122.
 - 20 *Ibid.*, pp. 124-125.
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6

THE FIRST ARREST: 29 MAY-4 JULY 1927

Bhagat Singh was arrested by the Lahore police on 29 May 1927 in the evening as he alighted from the train at Lahore railway station having arrived there from Amritsar side. Bhagat Singh had given a fairly comprehensive account of this arrest and detention in his writing “Why I am an atheist?” It reads:

“In May 1927, I was arrested at Lahore. The arrest was a surprise. I was quite unaware of the fact that the police wanted me. All of a sudden while passing through a garden, I found myself surrounded by the police. To my surprise, I was very calm. I did not feel any sensation nor did I experience any excitement. I was taken into police custody. Next day, I was taken to the railway police lockup where I was to pass full one month.

“After many days’ conversation with the police officials, I guessed^x that they had some information regarding my connection with the Kakori party and my other activities in connection with the revolutionary movement^y. They told me that I had been to Lucknow while the trial was going on there^z; that I had negotiated a certain scheme about Kakori prisoners’ rescue; that after obtaining their approval, we had procured certain bombs; that by way of test, one of the bombs was thrown in the crowd on the occasion of Dussehra 1926.

“They further informed me, in my interest, that if I could give any statement throwing some light on the activities of the revolutionary party, I was not to be imprisoned but on the contrary set free and rewarded, even without being produced as an approver in the court. I laughed at the proposal. It was all humbug. People holding ideas like ours do not throw

x “Bhagat Singh, wearing an embroidered turban and Jodhpuri princely dress had attended the proceedings of Kakori Case in Session Court at Lucknow for whole day long (Jogesh Chatterji), *op. cit.*, p. 323.

y Bhagat Singh took part in a dacoity committed by the party in V. Chilanli Dt. Allahabad in 1923-24 (Evidence of PW 450 LCC — Chhattar Pal Singh), Jogesh Chatterji, *op. cit.*, pp. 226-227.

z Kanpur party centre was actively pursuing plans to rescue Bismil from jail in which both Bhagat Singh and Sukh Dev were actively involved.

bombs on their own innocent people.

“One fine morning, Mr. Newman, the then Senior Superintendent of C.I.D. came to me and after much sympathetic talk with me, told me that if I did not give any statement as demanded by them, they would be forced to send me up for trial for conspiracy to wage war in connection with Dushehra bomb outrage. And he further informed me that they had evidence enough to get me convicted and hanged. In those days I believed — though I was quite innocent — the police could do it if they so desired. That very day certain police officials began to persuade me to offer my prayers to God regularly twice a day. Now, I was an atheist. I wanted to settle for myself whether it was in the days of peace and enjoyment alone that I could boast of being an atheist or whether during such hard times as well, I could stick to those principles of mine. After great consideration I decided that I could not lead myself believe in and pray to God.”¹

Notably, Bhagat Singh himself refers to the ‘Almighty’ thrice in the letter written to his friend Amar Nath soon after his release from detention (P. 77). Besides Bhagat Singh, in his pen portraits of a galaxy of devout martyrs, whole heartedly echoes their lives’ last heavenly prayers, be it Kukas, Madan Lal Dhingra, Babbar Akalis, Bismil or, for that matter, Ashfaq and the rest.

An update

Bhagat Singh was arrested, outwardly, in connection with investigations into the bomb explosion at Lahore on 25 October 1926 on the occasion of Dushera procession: In this ghastly incident, 9 persons were killed and 50 injured. (vide *The Tribune*, dated 27.10.1926). The Government of Punjab had announced a reward of Rs. 5,000 for anyone giving a clue about the culprits. (vide *The Tribune*, dated 30.10.1926.) No one, in his senses could have suspected these youngmen of such a base and senseless act. Indeed, this gap of seven months between the incident and the arrest itself showed that actually the arrest was in no way related to the incident.

As if by a sheer coincidence, an exactly identical bomb explosion took place two years later on 23 October 1928 during Dushehra celebrations at Lahore. This incident too had a queer side-effect, namely, the revolutionaries’ bomb-factory being discovered by the police in April 1929. It so happened that a police Head Constable Noor Shah, associated with the investigation of the 1928 Dussehra Bomb case was simply gossiping at the shop of the ironsmith, who was doing the job of moulding the bomb cases at his shop in Lahore at the behest of the revolutionaries. The cop got suspicious, and his

suspicion ultimately led to the major raid at the Kashmir Building hideout on 15 April 1929: He appeared as P.W. 132 and the moulder Jalal Din as P.W. 130 before the Tribunal on 18 July 1930 to confirm the above facts. Significantly, on the margins of the text of the original manuscript of the case record, Martyr Sukh Dev had appended his comments on the testimony of Jalal Din which read: *"What a fine chance! See the outcome of a chance conversation and leisure gossip."*²

This is how, the twin bomb explosions on the same occasion in Lahore which did not have even the remotest link *per se* with revolutionaries got so badly mixed up with the revolutionary movement.

There is, however, no trace of doubt whatsoever about Bhagat Singh's

a c t i v e
association
with the
H.R.A. The
C.I.D. was
actively
shadowing
him, and his
n a m e
f i g u r e d
among 35
persons, in
P u n j a b ,
whose mail
was being
censored in
1 9 2 6 .
B h a g a t
Singh is
listed at
serial No.
16. "Bhagat
Singh
originally of
Jullundur
District,
now of

TO CENSOR MAIL OF 35 LEADERS

File No. 12/6/26-Political - 1926
(Home Department).

Our Criminal Investigation Deptt. has put up a list of 35 persons, in regard to whom there is reason to believe that resistance might be sent or received. Of these, ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ the correspondence of 8 only is at present covered by orders of detention, and to give full effect to the wishes of the Govt. of India it will, therefore, be necessary for the Local Govt. largely to extend the exercise of its powers under the Post Office and Telegraph Acts. It is needless to say that a sudden extension of this kind cannot be kept secret and that it will soon be common knowledge that correspondence is being detained on a large scale:

1. Bhag Singh, Canadian of Uppal Shop, Distt. Jullundur.
2. Karam Singh of Chhina Khurd, Distt. Jullundur.
3. Bohan Singh Jash of Chetanpura, Distt. Amritsar.
4. Gopal Singh Gauri of Garh Pattiana, Distt. Muzaffargarh.
5. Malla Singh of Paddi Sura Singh, Distt. Hoshiarpur.
6. Gurmukh Singh Musafir of Adwal, Distt. Attock.
7. Kartar Singh of Lalala, Distt. Ludhiana, Secy. of the Sikh Qaidi Parwar Sahak Committee.
8. Mangal Singh, B.A., of the Akali, Amritsar.
9. Hira Singh Dard of Ghagrot, Distt. & Nawalpindi.
10. Richpal Singh of Suniala, Distt. Jullundur.
11. Harchand Singh of Chak No. 220, Nakh Branch, Distt. Lyallpur.
12. Giani Kartar Singh of Chak No. 40, G.B., Distt. Lyallpur.
13. Kidar Nath Sehgal of Lahore.
14. Abdul Majid alias M.A. Majid of Bhall Mohalla, Mochi Gate, Lahore.
15. Ram Chandra, B.A. now of Lahore.
16. Bhagat Singh originally of Jullundur Distt. now of Khawasri, P.S. Mozang, Lahore.
17. Chhabil Das originally of Hianwali Distt., now of Lahore.
18. Dr. Satyopal of Lahore.
19. Nahta Anand Kishore of Wadhovalli, Lahore.

Order to censor mail of Bhagat Singh

Khawasri, P.S. Mozang, Lahore.”³

Bhagat Singh, is the son of Kishan Singh (g. v.), Sandhu Jat, originally of Khakher Kalan village, Banga Police Station in the Jullundur district, but now of Khawasri near Sandhu, Mozang Police Station, Lahore District, and the nephew of the notorious Ajit Singh (g. v.). He was a matriculation student in the Lahore D. A. V. High School in 1921, when he left school in pursuance of the Non-co-operation scheme and joined the Lahore National College, where he remained for about three years. He was known to hold extreme political views and was said to be a Lieutenant of Kidar Nath Sehgal (g. v.). In 1924, he went to Lyallpur, G. B. in the Lyallpur district, where his father owns some land. While there he entertained the Lyallpur *shahidi Jalsa* which was on its way to Jaitan, with the result that his prosecution under section 17 (1) of the Criminal Law Amendment Act was ordered. He absconded, however, and was reported to have gone to the United Provinces and to have stayed for about a month at Cawnpore, where he is believed to have associated with Harnat Mohanti and his party. From Cawnpore he is said to have gone to Aligarh and to have acted for about three months as Head Master of the National Muslim University School, but the U. P. Police were unable to verify this information. After this he returned to the Punjab and remained in hiding being harboured by his father and Bhaba Anand Kishore (g. v.). In February, 1926, he was suspected of being concerned in the distribution of the revolutionary leaflets in Lahore. He took part in a political drama performed at Gujranwala on the occasion of the Punjab Provincial Political Conference in October, 1925, and although absconding from justice, he also intererated himself in the affairs of the Zamindar Sabha formed to resist the increase in canal water rates. It was eventually decided to drop the Criminal Law Amendment Act case, and at the end of 1925, he appeared in Lahore, where he lived with his father, who is an agent of the Vulcan Insurance Co., and worked in his office. In the spring of 1926 a society known as the Young India Association or *Naz Jawan Bhawan Sabha* was formed at Lahore by a group of extremists. The avowed objects of the Society are to prepare young men for political service, to popularise the use of Khaddar and to work for Hindu-Muslim unity, but its proceedings at its weekly meetings show that it was strongly impregnated with revolutionary ideas. This society will require careful watching as it is likely to be used as a cover for revolutionary activity and to form the nucleus of a revolutionary group. Bhagat Singh is the Secretary and his principal associates are for the most part members of this association. He may be regarded as one of the potentially dangerous men in the province at the present time.

Description.—Age about 22 years; medium height; thin; oval face; fair complexion; slightly pock-pitted; aquiline nose; bright eyes; small beard and moustache; wears khaddar.

C.I.D. File No. 9349:1926 — declaring him as a potentially dangerous man

Whether the fact of censorship was within the knowledge of Bhagat Singh at the time of his arrest or not, is not really known but he was certainly aware of it during his period of bail. Sometime after his release on 4 July 1927, he made a pointed reference to this effect in his letter to his friend Amar Chand who was then in U.S.A.

Sardar Kishan Singh was constrained to knock the doors of Lahore High Court for getting his son released on bail. The bail was granted on 4 July 1927 while the arrest was made on 29 May. The arrest had been made under a charge of murder under section 302 of I.P.C. as per the document discovered in the Exhibits file of the case.⁴

The amount of surety demanded for the release was Rs. 60,000/-, by all accounts, an astronomical sum in 1927. According to Verinder, it was the generosity of Sardar Kishan Singh's friend Barrister Duni Chand of Lahore and Mr. Daulat Ram, who came to his rescue to share equally the burden of this huge amount: Of the two, Daulat Ram, according to Ms. Verinder, was in fact a supporter of the Government but volunteered to do so on grounds of conscience.⁵

Soon after securing bail for his son, Sardar Kishan Singh, beat him with his stick in his office at Lahore as per Mata Vidyawati's recorded interview narrated earlier.

While on bail Bhagat Singh wrote a letter to his friend Amar Chand (of the same village) who was in U.S.A. The letter is in Urdu, whose English version reads:

*Dear brother Amar Chand,
Namaste!*

Submitted that, this time I came here (to the village) due to the sudden illness of Mother and also had the privilege of meeting your revered Mother. Today, I read your letter. While writing on her behalf (your mother) I too got a chance to write a few words (of mine). What should I write? Karam Singh had gone to England; his address is being sent to you. As for the present, he has written that he would study further. But as to how he is going to do that, (only) God knows! Expenses involved are enormous. Brother, my desire to go abroad for higher education was stifled. All the same, my best wishes to you. If possible, please do send me some good books; beyond doubt, there is abundance of (good) literature in America. Any way, at the moment, you would*

be fully engrossed in your studies.

From around San Francisco, some clue about Sardar ji (Sardar Ajit Singh) could possibly be found; please do try. At least we may get an assurance about his being alive. For the present I am going to Lahore. Write to me please, if you can. Address — Sutar Mandi, Lahore.

What else should I write. My fate has been rather queer; countless difficulties have befallen me. Eventually the case was withdrawn (presumably a reference to the 1924-25 warrant of arrest). (On the right side margin) I was arrested again in 1927 and was released on a bail bond of Rs. 60,000. So far no case has been instituted against me and God willing it won't be. It is going to be about one year, but I am not yet been relieved of this bail bond. Be it all as per God's* will! Brother, continue your studies with heart and soul.*

*Yours obediently,
Bhagat Singh*

On behalf of his friend's mother:- (continues — on the top of the paper)

"Please keep on writing (to me) about your welfare (more) often. (Else) A lot of worry is caused.

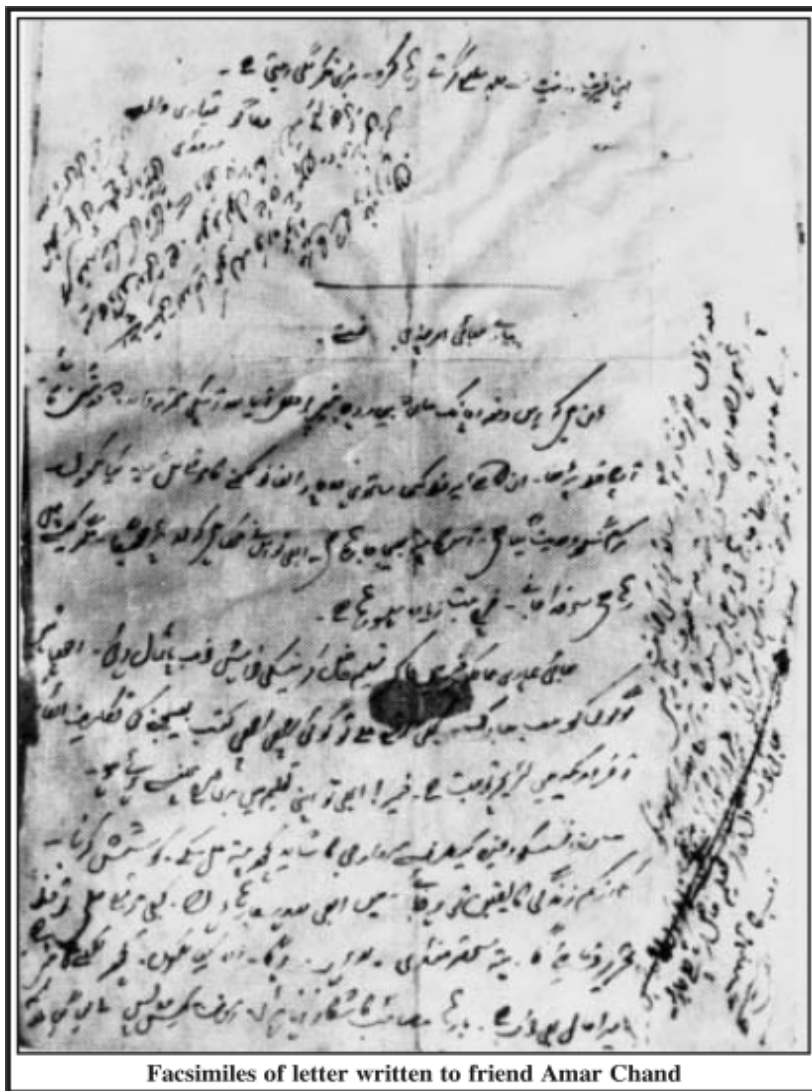
With blessings,

*Your mother,
Aruri*

(continues writing upside down — on the top of the main letter)

"What else I should write about myself. (I) am a victim of suspicions for no rhyme or reason. My mail is censored. (My) letters are opened. (I) wonder on what account have I been an object of such (an acute) degree of suspicion. Well Brother, ultimately truth shall be uncovered and (truth) would (ultimately) prevail."

Note: Amar Chand was able to connect Bhagat Singh with his uncle through his father Madho Ram, a Ghadrite. S. Ajit Singh was then in Brazil at Rio de Janero.



Verinder had described the lifestyle her uncle while he was on bail from 4 July to February 1928 and his endeavours to speed up its cancellation by persistent representations to the authorities on behalf of the sureties to that end.

She had devoted a separate chapter titled “Dairy and Diary” depicting the involvement of Bhagat Singh in running the dairy at his farmhouse abode near Lahore, besides in endless conclaves with his comrades at his farmhouse.

More importantly, he immersed himself in researching and writing about martyrs of revolutionary movements of the past, a theme closest to his heart. Most of his writings in this regard were written during second half of 1927 and early 1928. These were published in ‘*Kirti*’ in Punjabi and later in ‘*Chand*’ in Hindi.⁶

An intriguing photo

It was taken secretly by the police for reasons not difficult to guess at Lahore railway station police station. As per his ‘body-language’, Bhagat Singh looks fully ‘natural’ in the photograph as he was totally unaware of the camera.



The old person, talking to him is Gopal Singh, D.S.P., C.I.D, an old hand in interrogating revolutionaries since he was an investigator during the *Ghadrite* trials in 1915-16 as well. He belonged to village Naushehra Pannuan (District Amritsar). He figures as P.W 231 in the trial, where he mentions having interrogated Sukh Dev, soon after his arrest in April 1929, Bhagat Singh’s left hand is fettered; presumably, the loose end of the chain had been secured with an arm of the cot with a lock, the routine practice followed by Punjab police for ‘under-investigation’ detainees; the loose end of the chain is otherwise invisible. Besides, it is futile to hand-cuff a person while keeping the free end of the chain unsecured. The middle (free) part of the chain is being held by Bhagat Singh in both hands as if he was fiddling with the chain.

The cot is pretty oldish; in the background the wall is plastered up to

the level of Bhagat Singh's head, with the upper portion having semi-bare bricks, typical of a make-shift prison-cum-investigation centre.

On the head side of the cot, another chair similar to the occupied one is lying empty, indicating either someone having vacated it on purpose, or in anticipation of another C.I.D. man joining the interrogation.

The time, appears to be around noon as the shadow of the bed is too small and a little right ward, implying a time just before noon or after.

The respective body languages of the two persons would be obviously open to divergent interpretations but the duo appear to be fully engaged in conversation, while Gopal Singh is talking and Bhagat Singh is listening intently while looking straight into the eyes of his interrogator inquisitively without betraying any emotion.

Bhagat Singh's height vis-à-vis the D.S.P. is under-played due to a slight hunch in his back possibly because he was sitting on a loose cot, thus distorting his posture.

His legs lie crossed at the level of his ankles indicating an extended period of being seated in this posture.

His long hair (of head) are tied loosely in traditional way of a Sikh with knot, sliding on the backside than being the centre of his head; also visible are some loose hair falling back hanging loosely.

His timeworn shirt, visibly torn on the right chest side, apparently because of an accidental friction with a sharp edged object.

On lower part of his body he is sporting a loose-sheet like '*chadder*', the customary wear of the Punjabi rural folk, the cloth being rolled up above the knees perhaps due to hot weather.

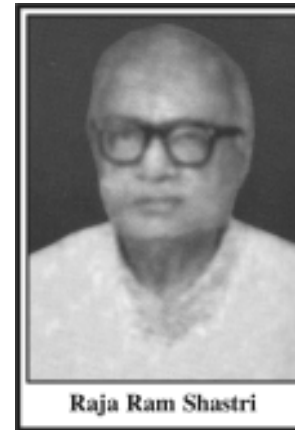
It may also be observed that it is much easier for the wearer of a '*chadder*' to conceal a revolver in the *dabb* by rolling it into the upper ends of the '*chadder*' and then tucking it down below the groins. Quite often the drunkards conceal a bottle of liquor in the same way quite successfully!

About his dress style, as per the observation of his associates like Yashpal, such kind of dress was typical of Bhagat Singh.

Finally, since the photograph was clicked secretly for the purpose of keeping a track of Bhagat Singh, quite a few copies would have been prepared and placed in different places in view of his known mobility / ubiquity.

(Photo Courtesy:- Mr. Gurbachan Singh Bhullar and Er. Darshan Natt: 4-4-2002)

An aside Dwarka Das library and its librarian



Dwarka Das library was a rich mine of books for radical youth in Lahore: Located around it were a string of colleges. Its reading room was always crowded with students. What made this library, much more than 'just a collection of books', was its librarian **Raja Ram Shastri**, just 21 years old then, who took over the library's charge in the all important year- 1926.

Raja Ram remained in the job till 1930, when he was imprisoned for having delivered an 'objectionable speech' during the Civil Disobedience Movement launched by Gandhiji. He was also summoned as a witness in Lahore Conspiracy Case (P.W. 427), then a prisoner in Gujarat Jail. He appeared before the Tribunal on 19.8.1930.

After his release in 1931, he settled at Kanpur and along with Harihar Nath Shastri actively participated in Labour movement. After 1947, he also became a legislator in U.P. and represented Indian working class in various world fora in European countries. He had published his memoirs in Hindi in 1981, a selection from which was translated in Punjabi in 2004 by Comrade Narbhinder Singh.

Apart from this writing, a recorded interview of Shastri ji is also available in Nehru Memorial Library and Museum, Teen Murti, New Delhi. The Museum authorities have been kind enough to provide relevant pages of its transcription in Hindi. Both of these are full of anecdotes, episodes and reflections, which all seem so fresh to read as if these were just yesterday's happenings. This is remarkable indeed since these memoirs were recorded half a century later when the author was well into his mid-seventies.

He vividly recalls:

"The golden opportunity which I got in working in this library was truly a turning point in my life. During my student days at Kashi Vidyapith, I was much impressed by the political revolution of France, and I had

selected this very topic for my course work research project. Since till 1926, I had never been exposed to the Socialist ideology and was not aware of the Russian Revolution, the question of my being under its influence did not arise. Thus I continued to be imbued with nationalism and patriotism as my articles of faith.

“When I reached Lahore, I got employed in the library, whence I got a chance to study books by authors like, Karl Marx, Lenin and being impressed by their perusal I became a Socialist. There were very many remarkable books in the library; under the guidance of Lala Jagan Nath and Lala Feroze Chand, I began selecting purchasing books from leading book-sellers of Lahore such as Ram Krishan and Sons.

“All around the library, there were colleges. Thus a large number of students used to visit its reading room daily. I was always seeking an opportunity to suggest to youngmen to read socialist literature. It did not take long for me to notice that this library was frequented both by the revolutionary party youth as also by C.I.D. men. I started keeping a sharp eye on the readers to identify such students who were of radical outlook, who could be won over to socialism by providing to them revolutionary literature. It was out of this urge that I became acquainted with youngmen like Bhagat Singh, Sukh Dev, Yashpal, Bhagwati Charan Vohra, Hans Raj Vohra, Dhanwantari, Ram Krishan, Ahsan Ilahi, Durga Das Khanna and others. Out of these all, Bhagat Singh, Sukh Dev, Yashpal and Bhagwati Charan Vohra got closer to me.

“I used to put up in a small room in the *Lok Sewa Mandal Bhawan* just near the library: For food, I depended on one or the other nearby roadside *dhabas*. Bhagat Singh and Sukh Dev became so free with me that whenever they happened to be around, they would often come to me, and our discussions on socialism often lasted well beyond midnight.”⁷

“Bhagat Singh was jovial by nature whereas Sukh Dev was a bit moody: Typically, once I was having food in a hotel and Bhagat Singh spotted me as he was passing by. Having seen me, he came and sat facing me and started talking at length, I understood that there must be some purpose behind it. On the one hand, he involved me in his discourse and on the other, he started eating from my ‘*thali*’. I lost my temper, as he had not even washed his hands and had started eating. He said ‘After all I have come to share something with you; let me say that,’ and continued eating.

“Now I shall tell you something about his style of enjoying the food: He would ask whether or not I liked ‘*kheer*’. “What is wrong with you?”

I said, “I like ‘*kheer*’ but it is too costly.” ‘Come on! once you are going to dine, do it in style,’ he would say and he would himself order ‘*kheer*’, and so many other things. I would get upset, and had Sukh Dev been also there matters would be still worse! I would be facing orders pouring from both sides.⁸

“Fed up with all this, I decided to take my revenge. One day, while Bhagat Singh was enjoying his food in the hotel, I quietly slipped away hinting that I would be back in no time after purchasing a ‘*paan*’. But I, instead of coming back, hid myself in a nearby spot from where I could watch the drama. Bhagat Singh having finished his meal was puzzled since the hotel owner demanded the payment: Hot arguments followed and then I rescued both of them.

“Later one fine day, Bhagat Singh forced me to promise that I would do what he asked me to do if I were his true friend. When I resisted and first asked him to disclose what task he had in his mind for me to perform, he showed me the photograph of an ape: He desired that I would show the photograph to one of our friends, and watch his reaction and then narrate it to Bhagat Singh! It was none else than Bhagwan Das Mahore who was the object of this prank. Upon my flat refusal, he said, “O.K. I shall send it to him by post and on the cover of the envelope, I shall write ‘From Raja Ram Shastri’.”⁹

“Another scenario: my room was too small, just enough for a cot. Bhagat Singh and Sukh Dev come at around midnight three knocks on the door — I open it.... They start undressing in style — with myself lying on the small cot. They would seat themselves on my cot, both on either side. A bit later, they lie besides me..... Feeling suffocated I leave my bed and lie on the floor, and they enjoy the cot. Then Bhagat Singh would say to Sukh Dev, ‘Look Sukh Dev, you ‘ll concede one thing, how great is Raja Ram. The moment he found his friends are there, he leaves his bed. Really great!’ I felt doubly cheated — first, for having been deprived me of my bed, and on top of providing fun at my cost! Not yet content with all this, they would say ‘Socialism enjoins upon us all to equally share the troubles. It does not look proper if we keep lying on the cot and he sleeps on the floor’. Then cot would be turned up alongside the wall and all of us lie on the floor. This was their typical way of entertainment!

“A tailpiece: One day I was back from the market having made some purchases. While I was just about to open the door and place the newly bought articles, Bhagat Singh dropped in; whilst I placed the

articles on the table. Bhagat Singh having seen the oil bottle, started scratching his head, and said, 'I know you'll refuse, but truly speaking my hair had been without oil since long. How nice would it be if you gift me some oil?' I said, 'Bhagat Singh, you have the bad habit of forcibly sharing the food I'm eating, getting into my bed while I am asleep, now when I have brought a little bottle of oil, you have set an eye on that too.' Bhagat Singh said, 'Look brother! now when there is yearning in my mind, you should be compassionate. When my head is itching, can't you spare it?' Ultimately he came down to the plea that 'If a more powerful person makes a demand on you, which you cannot resist, you should concede the demand gracefully; otherwise he will snatch it from you. You'll lose both ways!' I said, 'If a dacoit threatens a coward, the latter should not yield. We should resist such an outrage to the best of our might.' Eventually, Bhagat Singh began snatching the oil bottle from my hands and succeeded. Lo behold, instantly he opens the cork and pours the entire oil on his head... the oil dripping from his head. I retorted — what is this nonsense! The reply was, 'When one finds something belonging to him slipping away, he should compromise; better retain half than lose all.' He started a discourse on the strategy adopted by Lenin at a certain stage of Russian revolution....

"Paradoxically the dispute started from sharing oil, and morphed into a serious argument on strategy for success in a revolution whence abruptly Bhagat Singh said, 'Much had been talked about the revolution, let us go and enjoy *'lassi'* and *'rasgullas'*."

"...he was thoughtful to the core, jolly and a patriot. All the time, he was possessed by a sublime kind of ideal!"¹⁰

Propagating revolution

"When we became yet more intimate, his visits to my living room and library became a routine. To ward off any suspicion, I got him enrolled as a library member. My sole pursuit in the library was to become familiar with all books related to revolution. We both resolved to make an optimum use of the library to attract regularly visiting youth to the radical path.

"Bhagat Singh had entrusted me the job of identifying good books and the best ones to be given to Sukh Dev and himself for reading. Later, such books were made available in the college hostels. We also managed to get some pamphlets written by persons like Principal Chhabil Das to be printed and distributed.

"Once he showed me Vir Savarkar's 'First War of Indian Independence.' He was not willing to lend it to me at any cost. When I insisted a bit too hard, he agreed to give the book to me for a day or two and I finished reading it in 36 hours. It was a banned publication. Bhagat Singh proposed to get it reprinted and managed a publisher. He used to bring its proof in the evening and I saw these proofs during the night. It was published in two volumes — price being 8 *annas* (half of a rupee). The first copy was sold to Purushottam Das Tandon!

Pen Portraits of Martyrs!

"Bhagat Singh always strived to attract the attention of the youth towards the lives and deeds of the martyrs. He collected their photographs from here and there, wrote their brief life sketches and got them published in various magazines like '*Kirti*' and '*Chand*.' He also got slides made from these photos to be projected by a magic lantern in public gatherings. Of all such Martyrs, Kartar Singh Sarabha was his role model."¹¹

"Bhagat Singh was highly disturbed by communal discords and riots. He wondered about this, phenomenon since God is perceived to be a uniting force. Perhaps fed up with this he turned to the study of philosophers like Bakunin and studied his book 'God and the State.'"

Anarchism and other essays

"Among the galaxy of books which he read, one Paul Vaillant needs particular mention. In this book, there was an article titled 'Psychology of Violence' by a French anarchist revolutionary, containing his statement which he made before the court during his trial. When asked as to why had he thrown bomb in the assembly? Why did he not adopt some other way of protest? Vaillant's reply was, 'I led workers' demonstrations, held meetings, made speeches. All this made no difference to the Government. I was observing that the French society was sitting on the mouth of a volcano which was about to explode. Realizing that to shake this deaf society out of sleep, a bang was needed, I caused an explosion in the assembly. I have no regrets over my act.

"The article was quite lengthy which had been completely reproduced in that book. I had read it myself, I strongly recommended it to him. I issued the book to him. When he came back after having read it, he, while embracing me warmly said, 'Dear, you have given me an extremely valuable piece of reading.' Also he patted me on my back. He read it so many times that I lost count.

"I recollected all this vividly when I read his statement before the Session Court after assembly bomb incident."¹²

Bomb making technique

"Once he insisted that I find out for him a prescription for bomb making. I scanned many books but all in vain. I felt dejected since I could not fulfil Bhagat Singh's keenest desire. One day I decided to scan each and every book — and I found the answer in the most unexpected writing, "Encyclopedia Britannica". Next day I showed it to him — and the thrill and excitement I experienced in doing so, I can't forget till today! He wanted to take the book along with him, and when I expressed my inability to allow that, since it was a book in the Reference Section, he copied it out in full and heartily patted my back."¹³

My testimony before the Tribunal

"A library book *Administration of Ireland* issued to Sukh Dev was recovered during the raid on Kashmir Building on 15 April 1929 when Sukh Dev and others were arrested. In this connection I was summoned to appear before the tribunal. One day, while waiting to be called, Superintendent of C.I.D. Abdul Aziz, took me to a separate room and started talking to me about the accused in the case. He lamented that due to the non-cooperation of accused persons, the case was not moving; One after the other, they declined to come to the court. Look, today Sukh Dev has not come. How can the case proceed further? Sukhdev's presence on that day was vital since my testimony related to him."¹⁴

"When after sometime I was called to depose, Bhagat Singh who was present, smiled at me, indicating that he was expecting some fun. Truly speaking, we both were fun loving and always discovered some thing amusing.

"Upon my entering the court, the Public Prosecutor said, "Can you identify Sukh Dev?" "Yes, certainly". The Tribunal Judge ordered me to go near accused persons and point out Sukh Dev. Having looked at them I replied in a solemn tone, 'Sir, as per your order, I am willing to do so but when Sukh Dev had not come to the court today, how could I identify him?' Bhagat Singh had a hearty laugh. The judges got annoyed and said, 'How do you know that Sukh Dev had not come to the court today?' I kept quiet but when the Judges repeated the same question I said, 'Before appearing in the court, C.I.D. officer told me in confidence that Sukh Dev has not come to the court. So when he has not come here,

Sirs, how can I identify him.' This was followed by some hot exchanges of words and ultimately I was ordered to be taken out of the court."¹⁵

Bhagat Singh on Hunger Strike

"Once I went to the court to watch the proceedings during the hunger-strike of Bhagat Singh and other friends. He was brought on a stretcher. During the lunch interval, we both came face to face in the verandah. For a few moments none of us could utter a word. He then broke the silence. 'Brother Raja Ram, please forgive me for not returning your ten rupees which I had borrowed, as per my promise.' 'O! you are still worried about that. Strange that you are worrying about it till now!' I said, with a choked voice. We put hands on each other's shoulders. Even now my eyes moisten whenever I think of that moment.

The lion Roars in the Cage too!

"One day I observed in the court that a Judge, finding Bhagat Singh joking with his fellow accused, said, 'Why are you laughing, Bhagat Singh? I can't tolerate this.' Bhagat Singh stood up and jingling his handcuff chains, while standing upright said, 'Magistrate Sir, now you resent my laughing but what would you do when I shall be laughing at the scaffold shouting *Inqilab Zindabad*?' The Magistrate blushed and kept silent.

The last meeting

"During 1930, I was sentenced to two years' rigorous imprisonment in Salt *Satyagraha* movement. My case was transferred to Lahore Central Jail. I saw Bhagat Singh from a distance and somehow managed to get close to him. After a tight embrace, he said, 'How come you are here?' I said, 'I got two years rigorous imprisonment in Salt agitation and from Shekhupura Jail I have been sent here.' 'Such a long imprisonment in Gandhiji's movement', he said. To update him, I disclosed that I had left Lahore quite some time back. 'Now I understand why Raja Ram had stopped sending me books', said Bhagat Singh. Just when we were going to part, I said, 'Dear brother, the revolutionary literature which you read so thoroughly and which we had discussed, you have made it a goal of your life, and have thereby immortalized Dwarka Das Library. It has been sanctified by its association with you....'

Saying this we held each other in tight embrace before parting forever."¹⁶

One final reflection

“Till date I have not been able to understand one thing about him; that we had deep bonds of friendship but whatever secret work he did, was never disclosed to me. Also if he went for some ‘action’, he would never mention it to me.... There is another greater mystery which I could never resolve; despite such a close friendship, he never asked me to join his party.”

Bhagat Singh’s perception on the question of Shastri, joining the party were revealed by him just before he was finally leaving for the ‘action’ in Central Assembly in his letter to Sukh Dev dated 5.4.29 wherein he had written:

“You have some duty towards the public, and that you can fulfil by continuing this work. As a suggestion I would say that M. R. Shastri (Raja Ram Shastri was nicknamed Mast Ram Shastri) appeals to me more than ever. Try to bring him in the arena, provided he himself may be willing, clearly knowing the impending dark future, let him mingle with other fellow workers and study their mindset. If he could work in the right spirit, he will be very useful and will prove extremely valuable. But do not be in haste. You are a better judge. Proceed as you may deem fit. Now brother, let us be happy.”¹⁷

...But Sukh Dev was arrested soon after, that is, on 15 April 1929 leaving little time for him to follow it up.

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- 5 Verinder Sandhu, *op. cit.*, p. 157.
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- 7 *Amar Shahidan Dian Yaden* (Punjabi version of the Memoirs of Raja

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- 8 *Transcription of the Memoirs of Raja Ram Shashtri* (Hindi Original); Nehru Museum Library, Teen Murti, New Delhi, pp. 219-220.
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- 11 *Amar Shahidan Dian Yaden*, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-12.
- 12 Ibid., pp. 24-26.
- 13 Ibid., pp. 28-29.
- 14 Malwinder Jit Singh Waraich and Rajwanti Mann, Vol. II, (Court Order of 19.8.1930.
- 15 *Amar Shahidan Dian Yaden*, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-60.
- 16 Ibid., pp. 32-34.
- 17 *Transcription of the Memoirs of Raja Ram Shashtri*, (original in Hindi), pp.229-230.

...the purpose behind going through the past political agitations, such as Kuka Movement is not that the same kind of movements be replicated: The aim is just, that the people should derive inspiration from examples of dedication to the cause of freedom and to imbibe that spirit now. — Bhagat Singh

7

AT MARTYRS' FEET — 'PHANSI ANK' OF CHAND, NOV. 1928

Recalls Durga 'Bhabi' in 1985:

"Its publication at Diwali had stoked the fires of independence and ignited sparks of revolution all over the country.

"The terrified government lost no time in banning it and seizing all its copies, though by then hundreds of out of its 10,000 copies had already been distributed, read, copies made thereof and circulated here and there, everywhere, which literally electrified the country."¹

But why after all the government got so terrified upon publication — by circulation of a purely factual accounts of past Martyrs? It can be understood because right since 1907, the days of India House London, the life accounts of past martyrs had been employed to draw people into the freedom struggle, with great effect.

So much so that the Report of the ill-famed Rowlatt Committee which contained a detailed account of revolutionary activities till 1917 was a compulsory reading for new entrants in the revolutionary movement. That explains why the copies of the said report were by police from almost every den of the young rebels during 1929-30.

Of the 53 bio-sketches in the publications as many as 41 were perhaps penned by Bhagat Singh, each one under a difference pen-name such as 'Basant', 'Gautam', 'Vidrohi', 'Chakresh' and the like. It testified to his single-minded dedication to the task of chronicling lives and deeds of martyrs, digging out their photographs and ceaseless propagation of their deeds by displaying their photographs on magic

lantern in every public function, and extolling them as role models to the coming generations.

That he could access official/judicial records which are not presently available without crossing many bureaucratic hurdles, and the rare photographs as experienced by, this writer is truly phenomenal.

According to Jai Gopal (approver) Bhagat Singh had procured the following documents relating to previous trials of revolutionaries:

- 1) Lahore Conspiracy Case I (13.9.1915)
- 2) Lahore Conspiracy Case II (30.3.1916)
- 3) Babbar Akali Conspiracy Case (28.2.1925)
- 4) Delhi Conspiracy Case (5.10.1914)

Of these four, the Lahore Conspiracy Case I and Babbar Akali Case judgements are preserved in original at Khatkar Kalan the ancestral village of Bhagat Singh in the Museum.

The writer has minutely perused, edited and published both these as separate publications in the year 2001 and 2007 respectively.

As for the *Babbar* Case Judgement, the elaborate underlining and 'side-lining' speaks volumes of the thoroughness of a dedicated researcher with single minded devotion.

Regarding the First Lahore Conspiracy Case Judgement, the closely printed 400 full scape pages' judgement, each line had been keenly read as an 'insighful lawyer' and had scribbled marginal notes at numerous places.

Here is a modest attempt to present an overview of the writings by Bhagat Singh on Martyrs published from time to time, supplemented with some dates/years by this writer.

- (A) Kuka Movement (1871-72)
- (B) Upsurge in Punjab (1907)
- (C) Madan Lal Dhillon (1909)
- (D) Delhi-Lahore Conspiracy Case (1912-15)
- (E) Ghadr Movement (1914-15)
- (F) Martial Law in Punjab (1919)
- (G) Babbar Akali Martyrs (1926)
- (H) Kakori Case Martyrs (1927)

(A) Kuka Movement:

"Storm Centre of Revolutionary Movements", Punjab —
The First revolt for freedom (Published in *Kirti* (Punjabi), in Oct. 1928, under the pen name 'Vidrohi'.)

For the present, we are presenting to our readers an account of political awakening and revolutionary activities in Punjab. The pioneer attempt in this regard was made by *Kuka* movement. Apparently it looked like being religious in complexion, but keenly viewed it was political to the core; religion was also intermingled just like as it was in original stages of Sikh history.

How narrow minded are we (Punjabis) who, out of our narrow communal sectarian outlook, ignore such great revolutionaries like Guru Ram Singh? ...We may not regard him a *Guru* alright...but we can't go to the extent of being indifferent to his role in history. Bengalis are for superior to us in this regard who hold in high esteem all such personalities.

Punjab had just gone to sleep but it got drowned into deep slumber. Then arose this movement, part religious, part social, yet revolutionary in nature.

Having seen the atrocities perpetrated during 1857, and the lack of Punjab's involvement, must have made him restless: So while preaching social and moral regeneration, he also aroused the people against foreign slavery.

On 13 January 1872, out of a huge gathering of thousands, some 150 hot-headed persons held a conclave to launch a crusade against the evil princely states who were the main bulwark of foreign rule. Guru Ram Singh knew that this was to result in unnecessary bloodshed, while also providing an excuse to the Government to crush the movement. He had by his shrewd conduct and policy been able to put the Government off guard, and had made the Government remove restrictions imposed on them in 1863, to be removed in 1869.

The D.C. Ludhiana Mr. Cowan, had mentioned in his letter to Commissioner Ambala Division on 15th January, that Guru Ram Singh had also informed the police well in time that these persons were bent on mischief.

After the skirmish of the Kukas at Malerkotla, where 8-10 persons were killed on either side, and many were wounded, the remnants proceeded towards the territory of Patiala State. They spent the night in a jungle near the village Rarrh. The D.C. of Amargarh surrounded them, put them under arrest, 68 of them, some of these seriously wounded.

Wrote D.C. Ludhiana, Mr. Cowan, "It looks like the commencement of insurrection."

Next day, they were taken to Malerkotla where cannons had been



deployed in an open space, and before many onlookers 49 of them were blown off with cannons on 17th. The 50th Martyr of the day was a young boy of 12, Bishan Singh, who was called by the D.C. and asked to disown Guru Ram Singh, whereupon the boy caught hold of his long beard and did not leave it till he was cut to pieces. The rest, 16, were blown off the following day.

(B) Upsurge in Punjab (1907):

(i) First Political upsurge in Punjab in Freedom Struggle

(Written in jail, published in 'The People' and 'Bande Mataram' in 1931.)

While Punjab has been foremost in making sacrifices in the course of freedom struggle, yet it has to be admitted that it had lagged behind in the field of political awareness. The only reason behind it is that political agitation could not become a part and parcel of the lives of the Punjabis in general. In the literary field too, Punjabis had not fared well. For the intellectual, the question of Indian freedom remained a side issue. That is why it is said that Punjab is backward. Of course, certain other provinces are still behind Punjab in this regard, but sadly enough, Punjab continues to lag behind even after being called backward. Not having any particular language of its own, literary

creations were far and few. We had to depend, then, on western writings. To draw the attention of Punjabis towards this lacuna is the purpose behind these articles.

Before 1907 all was quiet on the political front in Punjab. By then the Congress used to affirm its loyalty to the Crown; that was all. However, the 1905-06 agitation on the issue of partition of Bengal including the boycott of foreign goods and call for *Swadeshi* had impacted the economic life of Punjab, and had also moved the Punjabi people in general. But in the long run it made little difference except the starting of some sugar factories in Punjab.

(ii) *New Colonies Act*

The newly settled farmers from eastern districts of Punjab, who had transformed the barren soil of Lyallpur and other Canal Colonies into fertile fields, were to be deprived of their ownership rights by this draconian measure. Numerous restrictions were imposed on their rights as owners, they could not even cut a tree from their land.

On the other hand, Sardar Ajit Singh, Sardar Kishan Singh had just attended the Congress Session at Calcutta in 1906, and those were



the days of rise of militant leadership in the party like that of B.G. Tilak. On their return they started a monthly paper 'Bharat Mata', and also formed a party 'Bharat Mata Society'. They were there to lead the farmers in their agitation. They had Sufi Amba Prasad, as their ace companion. Lala Lajpat Rai was also with them.

A popular poet **Banke Dyal** composed and recited a poem 'Pagari Sambhal O'Jatta' (Take care of your turban O' farmer) which has since become an a theme song of Punjabi folklore.

The agitation spread to the whole of Punjab and intelligence agencies regarded the situation as highly volatile.... Ultimately, the government had to yield!

(iii) *Sufi Amba Parsad*

(A part of the series: First article: 'Upsurge in Punjab – 1907'.)

(Born in 1858 at Muradabad, (UP). Martyred in 1916 at

(Shiraz Iran.)



Does anyone in India knows his name? Is there anyone who sheds tears in his memory? The ungrateful people have forgotten many of such gems, and yet donot have any feeling of remorse.

He was a patriot to the core. He felt the agony of the country in his heart. He yearned for the glory of *Bharat*. He wanted to take it to the pinnacle of progress. Even then only a few people are familiar with his name. Ironically, it were only in Iran where his worth was appreciated and till date he is revered there.

Sufi Ji was born in 1858 at Muradabad, U.P. He had lost his right hand since his childhood. He used to joke about it, saying, "We fought against the British in 1857; hand was cut off; death occurred, and in rebirth, the hand was missing." He did his Law but did not practise. He was an excellent writer in Urdu, and this is what he took to.

In 1890, he started an Urdu weekly from Muradabad, '*Jam-ul-Iluq*'. Each phrase in the paper reflected his thought and feelings. He was a master humourist, yet deeply thoughtful, never afraid of criticizing the authority.

He came to Punjab and took a job in 'Hindustan' paper in which he could not continue for long because of differences with the Editor. Those very days Sardar Ajit Singh had founded '*Bharat Mata Society*', which was soon followed by agitation against the Colonies Act. He joined Sardar Ajit Singh. In view of indiscriminate arrests Sufi ji left for Nepal along with Sardar Kishan Singh (Bhagat Singh's father) and Mehta Anand Kishore. There the Governor Jang Bahadur looked after them very well. But he had to pay the price; soon he was dismissed and his property forfeited. Sufi ji was arrested and was brought back to Lahore. He was arrested for his articles published in the paper 'India' run by Lala Pindi Das, but was acquitted for lack of proof.

By then Sardar Ajit Singh too was back from Mandley-Burma. 'Bharat Mata Book Society' was founded in 1908. Most of its functioning depended on Sufi Ji. He got a book published *Baghi Masih* or *Vidrohi Masih* which was proscribed.

In 1909, he published a paper *Peshwa*. Those days revolutionary movement became activated in Bengal. The Government feared that Punjab may also follow suit. Repression followed. Both he and S. Ajit Singh left for Iran to evade arrest.

Not much is known about his life in Iran except that, that he started a paper *Aabe-e-Hayyat* and started taking part in the freedom struggle of Iran. When the British tried to occupy Iran in 1915, there were lots of disturbances in opposition to the move. Sufi Ji was in Shiraz where he was encircled by armed soldiers, whom he resisted by firing from the revolver with his single hand. Ultimately he fell in their hands. It was decided to shoot him the following day. He was confined in a cell. When the door was opened next morning, he was no more and was found in a state of trance!

(C) Madan Lal Dhingra (1909)

(Published in *Kirti* (Punjabi) of March 1928, in a series of articles published by him from March to October 1928 on martyrs, which aimed at depicting their lives, while also analysing the nature of the movements sympathetically, so that the readers may be able to understand as to how political awakening evolved in Punjab, what shapes it took, and for which ideal, goals those martyrs went to the extent of sacrificing their lives.)

The First Punjab Rebel — Martyr Madan Lal Dhingra

(Birth: 8 February 1883 Amritsar; Martyrdom: 17 August 1909, Pentonville Prison, England.)

...What kind of stuff such martyrs are made of can best be seen through the eyes of the famous Bangla poet Qazi Nazarul Islam, vide his poem 'the Rebel' a free translation of which in English is:

Me the rebel, feels war weary

I too, shall rest when no cry of the suffering being
would rend the sky.

None will whine in agony,
and the blood thirsty dagger of cruel oppressors,
shall cease to pierce the innocent;

Nay, would vanish.

Then and then only would I rest in peace.

Such singularly exceptional rebels, who challenge the powers that



be, and jump into the flames of the wrath, forget all about their own well-being, while beautifying the world at large, and the human society moves forward by virtue of their mortification. Such heroes descend from time to time: India too had them, and shall continue to have them. Within India, Punjab had a plentiful share of such gems. In the twentieth century, the trail was blazed by Madan Lal Dhingra.

He was not a 'Neta' whose biography may have been published and quickly sold.

Nor was he an 'Avtar' descending on earth about whom the astrologers and devotees could weave anecdotes of divinity at his birth, suggesting that he was in fact born 'different'. Nor are we familiar with any rare feat of Dhingra's infancy or childhood on the basis of which we could have said "all this foreshadowed greatness."

He was a hapless rebel. His father had disowned him. Even the nationalist leaders like Bipin Chandra Pal who were known as radicals, not to mention the sycophants, showered on him the choicest abuses. Then how tough would be the task of obtaining the material for anyone to reconstruct his life sketch!

In such conditions we have undertaken to write this profile lest we forget his very name with the passage of time. Faced with this predicament I attempt to put together the bits collected about him to present the same before the readers.

Dhingra, perhaps, belonged to Amritsar, was from a well-off family, went to England for higher studies after doing B.A. He was bit of an eccentric as per the report of a security man: 'Dhingra was an extraordinary man. His passion for flowers was remarkable.'

In 1907 the British celebrated the Golden Jubilee of 1857 Mutiny. Indeed, it was a peculiar twist of circumstances that it was this event which nurtured the tradition of celebrating 10 May 1857 by Indians in England as the red letter day which heralded challenges to the very existence of British rule in India. The trend of glorifying past heroes of the struggle against the British rule germinated and caught on initially in England, then in Canada, America and even beyond, but not on Indian soil yet.

Inspired Dhingra shot at Curzon Wylie, a British secret agent, notorious for anti-Indian activities in a function on 1 July 1909 and admitted his action, and boldly faced the gallows on 17 August 1909. [Excerpted from — *Tryst with Martyrdom — Trial of Madan Lal Dhingra* by Malwinder Jit Singh Waraich and Dr. Kuldeep Puri.]²

(D) Delhi-Lahore Conspiracy Case (1912-15) — The Background

(These articles about the case were published in 'Kirti' of August 1928 (i) martyrdoms at the altar of liberty and (ii) famous Punjabi martyr Bhai Bal Mukand Ji.)

This case arose out of two bomb cases, the first at Delhi on 23 December, 1912 a bomb having been thrown on the Viceroy and the second at Lahore on 17 May 1913.

Of the 11 accused in the case namely Amir Chand, Abad Bihari, Bal Mukand and Basant Kumar were sentenced to death and Balraj, Hanuwant Sahay to transportation for life and the rest were acquitted. Of these Balraj was adopted as a mascot by H.S.R.A. as shown by the mention of his name as Commander-in-Chief of H.S.R.A. in both the posters issued/distributed namely the one on 18 December 1928 and the other on 8 April 1929. In substance these articles by Bhagat Singh are biographies of the four martyrs. — Ed.

(i) Master Amir Chand Ji (Martyrdom: 8 May 1915 in Delhi jail)



God fearing, 50 years old, highly educated Amir Chand ji was a teacher in Mission College School Delhi. He loved his Motherland deeply and always looked forward to its emancipation. He had good command over Urdu and English both. Initially he joined Swami Ram Teertha on his sojourn to Punjab. He put his heart and soul in disseminating his teachings through leaflets and books etc. When Hardyall returned to India from England after surrendering his government scholarship, he tried to raise a cadre of recluse volunteers to work for the Motherland. He

motivated many students to give up studies to join him. As per official reports when Hardyall left India in end 1908 he handed over the charge of this force to Master ji.

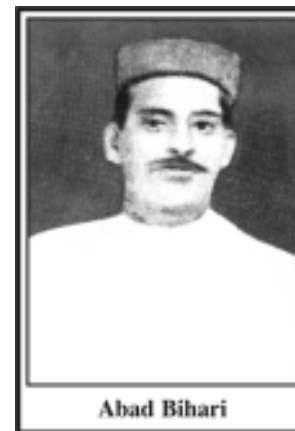
His arrest in the case was effected after the arrest of Abad Bihari from Calcutta, primarily, because the latter had mostly stayed with Master ji when he was at Delhi.

Liberty, the revolutionary leaflet of November 1913, was suspected to be his brainchild, since its hand written manuscript was recovered from his house.

During the trial, it was proved that he was a conspirator only, but since he was very able and wise, he had the capability to motivate many young men to join the conspiracy. So he was sentenced to death since, according to the judges, ...it was to him only that Hardyall's disciples were handed over; that Abad Bihari was his intimate friend; that Rash Bihari Bose was admittedly staying with him in his house in January and February 1914; that Ram Lal and Sultan Chand were being brought up by him as seditionists; that he took part in the preparation of *liberty* leaflet of November 1913, and that a bomb cap was actually found in a locked room in his house.

He braved the gallows with a smiling face in Delhi jail on 8 May 1915.

(ii) Abad Bihari



A brilliant young man, who did his Bachelor of Teaching from Lahore Training College after B.A. He was held responsible for writing *liberty* leaflet. He had been assigned the charge of revolutionary party in U.P. and Punjab. The author of *Bandi Jeewan* Sachindra Sanyal held him in high esteem. He was very lively by nature.

He was charged for the Lahore Lawrence Road Bomb Explosion. When he heard the order of his death sentence he felt elated. It is said that just before his execution he was asked, "What is your last wish?"

"Only this: Devil may take the English."

He was told, "Be calm. At least depart in peace now." These were the words of an Englishman. "Look Sir, what sort of peace, as of today?"

I desire that fire be ignited, all around.... We burn and our slavery too.... So that ultimately India emerges a purified gold." Saying this he leapt at the noose, put it around his neck and sacrificed his life at the altar of freedom on 8th May 1915 in Delhi jail. According to the judges, "Abad Bihari is a young man of great intellectual ability. He stood second, in the first division, in the Punjab University B.T. examination. There is, therefore, no inherent improbability in Dina Nath approver's statement that he was the author of May and July *Liberty* leaflets."

(iii) *Basant Kumar Biswas*



He belonged to Nadia (Bengal). He was just 23, and highly educated. Initially, Rash Bihari had taken him along, and employed him at his house. Then he was sent to Lahore where he joined as compounder in Popular Dispensary. It is believed, he had joined Abad Bihari in planting the bomb at Lawrence Garden, Lahore. He went back to Bengal in December 1913 and was arrested from there in 1914 and brought back to Lahore. Governor of Punjab Sir Michael O'Dwyer was highly annoyed since no clue could be found regarding culprits of Lahore Bomb Explosion. So it was he who intervened to get his life sentence enhanced to that of death. This had been admitted by him.

The judges had observed about Biswas, "He is not a boy, for at 23, an Indian has long reached maturity....He looked to me a man of some force of character, without the familiar marks of weakness on his face."

Basant Kumar Biswas had a long training, and was quite ready for anything, though he was kept purposely outside of the inner circle, so that if caught, he would not be able to give much information to his captors.

He went to gallows as a valiant fighter on 10 May 1915 in Ambala jail.

(iv) *Eminent Martyr of Punjab, Bhai Balmokand*

When Guru Teg Bahadur was martyred in Delhi by Aurangzeb, one of his disciples, a Brahman, named Mati Das too was martyred at the same time. Bhai Bal Mokand was his descendent and also happened



to be a paternal cousin of Bhai Parmanand, the famous *Ghadrite* of 1914-15. They both belonged to village Karijala in district Jehlum in Punjab. It was Rash Bihari Bose, who having been in contact with him for quite some time, entrusted to him the party organization in Punjab in 1910.

Interestingly, nothing was found against him, either in connection with the Delhi case or the Lahore incident. The judges had to admit that from the searches at his house at Jodhpur and also from his native Karijala village, nothing incriminating was found including any seditious

literature. At the time of his arrest, he was working at Jodhpur as a tutor to the princes in the palace. Secondly he had no direct connection with the Lahore bomb outrage or that July *liberty* leaflet.

While he was in the condemned cells, his wife **Ram Rakhi** met him and asked about his food, and obtained a sample: She started eating only similar food. Next meeting she asked him where and how he slept and was told that (her husband slept) in a closed room on the floor. In the hot summer, she followed the same practice. When she learnt of her husband's demise on 8 May 1915 whose dead body too had been denied to the family, she put on her bridal dress and ornaments, sat on a wooden platform and left this mortal world in a trance. Hail such martyrs!

(E) *Ghadr Movement (1914-15)*

Ghadr party was formed in America-Canada in 1913 by the concerted efforts of emigrant Indian workers, farmers, students and exiled intellectuals. It was named Hindi Association of the Pacific Coast but came to be named as *Ghadr* party by virtue of the title of its organ *Ghadr* which spread its message far and wide. This party aimed a repeat of 1857, another reason for its being called by that name. Bhagat Singh's family too had close links with *Ghadrites*.

According to the Tribunal, Sardar Kishan Singh had donated Rs. 1000 to the party in 1914. The H.S.R.A. manifesto was also issued in the name of Kartar Singh President H.S.R.A. In the 'Phansi Ank' issue of *Chand*, there are 22 articles on *Ghadrites*, written under different names presumably all of them were written by Bhagat Singh. The five of them are being presented: Kartar Singh Sarabha, Vishnu

Ganesh Pingle, Bhan Singh, Pandit Kanshi Ram and Bhai Balwant Singh.

Bhagat Singh's comments on *Ghadrites*, with reference to their abortive rising of 19th February 1915.

"There is something sublime even in the waywardness of these waywards. There was truly a glimpse of a new vision in it. Fired by their unbridled passion, on 19th February 1915, just 50 of them including the young man Kartar Singh dared to assault the best defended military cantonment. Despite their failure, the dice being loaded against them, they undoubtedly left their mark on history for their supreme dedication, unbounded zeal and extraordinary self-confidence."

"Bhagat Singh grew up in an atmosphere in which, disillusioned with the moderates' politics, many a patriot took to revolutionary politics. We owe it to Professors Malwinder Jit Singh and Harinder Singh a full account of the Ghadr movement of 1914-15 based on the judgement delivered by the Special Tribunal in what were truly the First Lahore Conspiracy Cases (*War Against King Emperor — Ghadr of 1914-15: A Verdict by Special Tribunal*, Bhai Sahib Randhir Singh Trust, Ludhiana, 2001).

Mr. A.G. Noorani too in his introduction to the latest edition of 'Trial of Bhagat Singh', 2005, had taken note of the impact of Ghadr Movement on Bhagat Singh in the light of the publication "War Against the King Emperor".²

(i) Kartar Singh Sarabha

(Born on 24 May 1896 at village Sarabha, district Ludhiana;

Martyred on 16 November 1915, Central Jail, Lahore —

Cremated secretly inside jail premises.)



Kartar Singh Sarabha

Born in a well-off family, had lost his father in childhood and was brought up by his grandfather Sardar Badan Singh. His urge for higher learning took him to America. When questioned by U.S. Immigration Officer, about his purpose of coming there, he said "higher education". Asked "Suppose you are denied entry". Replied Kartar, "It would be great injustice, prejudicial to the progress of mankind".

He was foremost amongst the activists of *Ghadr* party. He himself wrote, and

published *Ghadr* in hand operated printing machine. While doing all this he used to sing, "Hard enough is the path of patriotism, easy enough uttering speeches, those who follow the path of service to Motherland, have to bear countless agonies."

The Judges of the Tribunal wrote about him, "He is one of the most important of these 61 accused and has the largest dossier of them all. There is practically no department of this conspiracy in America, on the voyage and in India, in which the accused has not played the part."

Once his grandfather met him when he had been sentenced to death and said Kartar, "For whom you are dying? Who abuse you? It is also not apparent that the country shall benefit by your death."

Kartar calmly asked, "Grandpa, where is (one of our) relative?"

"Died of plague."

"Such and such (some other relative)?"

"Died of cholera."

"Which death is better to die wrenching on bed for months or some other way, like this?"

Grandfather had no reply. Even today the question arises as to why did he embrace death?

"For its own sake" is the reply; their dream was to die for the Motherland. Besides they wanted to die unsung, unhonoured and unwept: like:

*Chamane zar-e-mohabbat men usi ne baghbani ki,
Ki jisne apni mehnat ko hi mehnat ka samar jana.
Nahin hota hai mohtaje-numaish faiz shabnam ka,
Andheri rat men moti-luta jati hai Gulshan men.*

[English Translation]

He, for whom the labour in the garden of love,

In the labour of love

(Is) dew drops like, which quietly,

In pitchdark night, bestows wet pearls in the garden.

He was as happy as ever on the day of his martyrdom of 16 November 1915. (Source: '*Chand*', Punjabi version, pages 117-127)

(ii) Vishnu Ganesh Pingley

(Born on 2 February 1889 in village Talagaon Dhamdhera-Poona; martyred on 16 November 1915- Lahore central jail- cremated in jail premises.)



Right from the days of his childhood he had to bear the agonies of being born in a slave country. He was sent to America to study Engineering but got involved in revolutionary movement, the *Ghadr movement*. Back in India he was mainly instrumental in linking up *Ghadr* party with Benaras Group of Bengal revolutionaries led by Rash Bihari Bose, of 1912 Harding Bomb case fame. He, along with Kartar Singh, worked to set up a headquarter of the party at Lahore under the leadership of Rash Bihari Bose assisted by Sachindra Sanyal.

The plan of upsurge on 19th February failed because of the treachery of a secret agent in the party. Since *Ghadr* party's strategy, like 1857 uprising, was to actively involve the Indian soldiery, contacts had been established with various regiments. Kartar was deputed to set up a centre in 12th cavalry which was posted at Meerut. According to Rowlatt report, Rash Bihari and Pingley returned to Benaras but only for some days, and the latter took bombs with him to Meerut where he was arrested on 23rd March at 12 Cavalry Lines with a box in his possession containing 10 bombs, 'sufficient for annihilation of a regiment'.

When on 16 November 1915, he was about to be hanged, he was asked, "You want to say something?" "A couple of minutes respite to pray to Almighty", was his reply.

Handcuffs were removed and he prayed with folded hands. "Almighty! You know our minds. The sacred cause, for which we are sacrificing our lives, is left to you to be taken care of. May *Bharat* become free; that is the only wish." Saying this, he himself put the noose over his neck and said "good bye" to this world. ('Chand', Punjabi version, pages 128-129)

(iii) Bhan Singh

(Born in 1875 at village Sunet, District Ludhiana; martyred on 2 March 1918, Cellular jail, Port Blair, Andaman.)

Like many young men of rural Punjab, he too joined the army, and served in a cavalry regiment for a few years. Discharged from service, he went to America for earning dollars. But having realized that the

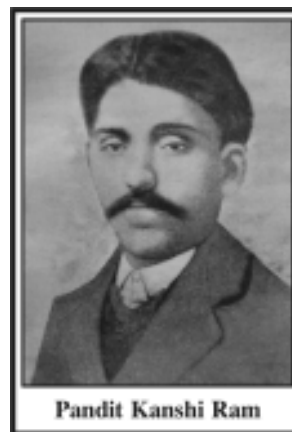


Motherland was in fetters joined the *Ghadr* party and upon its call to return to India for *Ghadr*, he arrived in India on 29 October 1915 and was interned in Montgomery jail. He was released, after being found innocent. He then put his heart and soul in the activities of the party. He was arrested and tried for war against the Emperor, sentenced to transportation for life, and sent to Cellular Jail Andaman.

Even in the hell-like life of Andaman, once, while standing in the door of his cell, he was singing the famous lines of Guru Gobind Singh, "*mittar piare nun haal murtadan da kahina*" (convey to my beloved friend, the predicament of the devotees). An English jail warden asked, "Who gave you the right to sing here?" He continued singing. He was then kept in total isolation and brutally thrashed, but he did not yield. When he was just near his end, the jail authorities, in order to save their skin, sent him to hospital where he expired just after his arrival. ('Chand', Punjabi version, pages 173-75)

(iv) Pandit Kanshi Ram

(Born in village Marauli Kalan, then in Ambala district, now in Ropar, on October 14, 1882. Martyred on 27 March 1915 in Lahore Central Jail, cremated in jail premises.)



The room in which he was born is still intact and well maintained. Having passed his intermediate, he left for U.S.A. where he ended up as a flourishing contractor. He was elected treasurer of the *Ghadr* party, left U.S.A. in response to the call to return to India for *Ghadr*.

In the course of their preparation for the uprising, *Ghadrites* planned an assault at Ferozepur cantonment armoury, which they postponed. They left for Moga on *tongas*. They were confronted by the police at village Misriwala. A clash ensued in which a Police Sub Inspector and a *Zaildar* were killed.

He, along with six other *Ghadrites* namely, Jiwan Singh, Rahmat Ali, Bakhshish Singh, Lal Singh, Jagat Singh and Dhian Singh were hanged in different jails on 25/27 March 1915.

When his old parents met him in jail a few days before his execution, his father asked him to repent and seek mercy in view of their poor financial condition. The recluse replied 'what gain could be derived from the illusory *Maya*. In this mortal world, none is truly a son or parent these are all illusions. Look at all the sons of the Motherland as your own sons and repose trust in them. (*Chand*, Punjabi version, pages 110-112)

(v) *Bhai Balwant Singh*

(Born on 15 September 1882 at village Khurdpur, district Jalandhar; martyred on 29 March 1917 in Lahore central jail; cremated inside the jail premises.)



Having served in the army for 10 years he came back to his village. He spent most of his time in meditation. In 1905 he proceeded to Canada. He was entrusted with the priesthood of first Sikh temple at Vancouver, which soon became the centre of revolutionary activities. This Gurdwara had in fact got constructed by him along with his companion Bhai Bhag Singh of Bhikhi Wind District Amritsar.

By 1907, the local whites started feeling jealous of these hardworking enterprising *blackies* and formed Asiatic Exclusion League to prevent the entry of Indians into Canada. The Indians who were already there, were not allowed to even bring their families. He, along with a few others, brought his family and waged legal battle to secure their entry. They did not succeed in their cause, though their own families were permitted to stay in Canada on grounds of mercy.

These issues could not be understood by the enslaved people of India, as to why they were tormented. The Indians sent a deputation to London and Delhi and also mobilized public opinion in India and England.

The deputation led by Bhai Balwant Singh also met Sir Michael

O'Dwyer, Governor of Punjab who noted in his secret report that 'this man looked like a dangerous revolutionary.'

Ultimately, he realised that nothing short of a revolutionary struggle to liberate India was the need of the hour. While he was travelling back to India alongwith his family, a son was born to him at Shanghai. He took a tough decision at this juncture. He sent back his family to India with his comrade Bhai Kartar Singh of Nawan Chand and he himself became active in party work in Thailand. He was arrested and sent back to India for trial. He was sentenced to death in Second Supplementary Lahore Conspiracy Case on 5 January 1917 and was martyred in Lahore central jail along with four of his comrades Harnam Chand Alias Nama, Dr. Rur Singh, Hafiz Abdulla, and Babu Ram.

Ghadrite Martyrs' list in Bhagat Singh's hand is displayed at the end of this Chapter.

F. Marshal Law-1919

Martyr Khushi Ram Ji:

(Born on 10 August 1900, Saidpur, District Jehlum — martyred on 12 April 1919 during firing of troops on a peaceful procession in Lahore.)

The year of 1919 shall be remembered in Indian history for ever. The World war had just come to an end. Indians, especially Punjabis, had enabled the British to win the war, but the vain Britisher rewarded us with Rowlatt Bill, the black act, which did not permit even a peaceful protest. Mass upsurge followed, ultimately leading to the imposition of Marshal Law.

Khushi Ram then a youngman of 19, had appeared in the *Shastri* examination of Punjab University at Lahore while being a student of D.A.V. College, Lahore.

On 12th April, a huge public meeting took place against the Black Act in the Badshahi Masjid of Lahore, in which Sikhs, Muslims, Hindus all had gathered. After the meeting the crowd marched in procession towards the city. They were confronted by the troops and were ordered to disperse. None cared for their orders and went ahead. Young Khushi Ram was in the lead. Seven bullets hit him one after the other, which did not deter him but he fell down to the eighth. Next day a funeral procession of 50,000 people joined his last journey. (Jagmohan, Writings, pages 121-123)

G. Babbar Akali Martyrs (1926)

Holi ke Din Khoon Chhinte (Blood Sprinkled on Holi)

[This was Bhagat Singh's first article on the martyrs, published in Hindi on 15 March 1926 under the pen name 'Ek Punjabi Yuvak' (A Punjabi youth).]



From Left: (1) Dharam Singh of Hayatpur, (2) Dalip Singh of Dhamian, (3) Kishan Singh Gargajj, Babu Santa Singh, (5) Nand Singh and (6) Karam Singh

On the day of *Holi*, 27 February 1926, while all of us were lost in fun and frolic, a terrible event had taken place in the populous province of Punjab, hearing about which your bones may chill and you may even tremble. In Lahore Central jail six patriots were hanged after trial in *Babbar Akali* Conspiracy Case namely S. Dharam Singh, S. Dalip Singh (Junior), S. Kishan Singh Gargajj, Babu Santa Singh, S. Nand Singh and S. Karam Singh.

The day the judgement was pronounced after 2 years of their trial, they all responded with heart rending shouts of victory *Bole so Nihal!*

The background: The Sikh community had to wage a long sustained struggle for liberation of their shrines/Gurdwaras from the lecherous priests the *Mahants*, who were fully backed by the Government of the day. Events like Nankana Sahib massacre 1921, Guru ka Bagh Episode 1922 and Jaito *Morcha* were the landmarks in this context. Since the Government was hand in glove with the *Mahants*, a radical section of the Akalis, who were agitating for the cause,

broke off from the mainstream and took up arms against the foreign rulers to aim at nothing less than total independence. But look at their spirit of sacrifice shown by their pledge, "We shall sacrifice our families in the service of the nation. We pledge that we shall die fighting rather than falling into the hands of the police."



The spot where the encounter took place

Among the different episodes of their movement two deserve special mention, **an encounter with police at village Babeli** near Phagwara on 1 September 1923 in which four of these were surrounded by military and police while they were in the village. Villagers were warned that either the *Babbar*s should come out in the open, else the whole village shall

be set on fire. Then the four of them, Sardar Karam Singh, Sardar Ude Singh, Sardar Mohinder Singh and Sardar Bishan Singh emerged while challenging the police and the military force. A pitched battle was fought, none of them ever thought of surrender and were martyred one after the other on the rivulet near the historic Gurdwara.

Another remarkable feat of courage and sacrifice is the martyrdom of **Dhanna Singh** of Behbalpur in village Mannanhana near Phagwara, Kapurthala district.



Dhanna Singh

He was betrayed by his host, who, before calling in the police to arrest him had taken away his revolver. On the fateful night of 25–26 October 1923, a big police force overpowered Dhanna Singh, while he was fast asleep. He was handcuffed and brought out of the house. Many constables and English officers surrounded him. He was taunted by the S.P., an English man, "Dhanna Singh, you had declared that I shall

not fall into the hands of the police alive. What now?" Whereupon Dhanna Singh with a powerful jerk exploded the bomb tied around his waist, killing himself as also the policemen.

To conclude, for more than two years (1922-24), *Babbars* kept the entire administration paralysed, to the extent that the police could not dare to move without military escort in the three districts of *Doaba* in Punjab namely Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur and Kapurthala. (Jagmohan, Writings, pages 38-42)

H. Kakori Martyrs:

(Four articles by Bhagat Singh published in *Kirti Punjabi* in January 1928 under the pen name 'Vidrohi'.)

(i) *Rajendra Nath Lahiri*

(Born in 1892, village Mohanpur, district Pabna, now in Bangladesh, martyred on 17 December 1927, Gonda jail)

He was a student of M.A. in Benaras Hindu University.



He was arrested in 1925 at Calcutta from a house which was a bomb factory. He was sentenced to 7 years of rigorous imprisonment in that case. Later he was tried in Kakori case. He was kept in Barabanki and Gonda jails. He had always laughed at death even when it stared him in the face. He was bold and jolly, just mocking at death. Two of his letters are before us. First Letter of 6 October 1927 when the Viceroy had rejected his mercy petition. "After spending 6 months in Gonda and Barabanki jails I have been told that I am going to be executed within a week, because the

Viceroy had rejected the petition: Now it is incumbent upon me to thank all my friends who tried their best for me. Accept my last greetings. For us, death denotes nothing beyond change of robes. I shall embrace it with cheer and joy. Being constrained by jail rules, cannot write more. Namaskar-Bandematram to you all, the well wishers of nation. Yours R.N. Lahiri."

The execution got deferred due to an appeal in the Privy Council. Thus, another letter — the last letter — was sent by him on 14

December 1927. "*Yesterday I have come to know that Privy Council had rejected my appeal. You tried your best to save us but it appears the Goddess of freedom needs our heads at its altar. Death is nothing but another version of life. Why fear then? I believe our sacrifices shall not go in vain. Yours R.N. Lehri.*"

How innocent, how touching is the letter and how childlike is its writer! He refused to be handcuffed for being taken to the gallows and volunteered to proceed there boldly. A big funeral procession was taken out. (Note:—On Bhagat Singh's suggestion, his youngest brother was named Rajinder Singh) (Jagmohan, Writings, pages 53-56)

(ii) *Ram Prasad Bismil*

(Born on 11 June 1897, Shahjahanpur, UP, martyred on 19 December 1927 at Gorakhpur jail.)



Ram Prasad was a talented young man, good looking, healthy, and a poet too. He was exceptionally able and knowledgeable. People used to say that had he been born in another place and conditions, he would have been an Army General.

He was singled out as the kingpin of the entire conspiracy and was sentenced to death. He was to be hanged on 19th December. On 17th evening, when he was offered milk he refused it saying that now I shall drink *Mother's* milk only. On 18 December, last meeting with family took place. His mother was of extraordinary courage. Seeing tears in his eyes, she enjoined upon him to offer his life for the righteous cause and the nation like our (legendary) ancestor Harish Chandra. He laughed and said, "Mother! why should I worry or repent? I am not afraid of death. But mother! 'ghee' does melt if kept close to the fire."

While being led to the gallows he shouted '*Vande Mataram*', *Bharat Mata ki jai*.⁵ He concluded his autobiography on 16th December with these lines —

Hundreds of patriots would be born
From the bloodstream of Martyrs.
Bismil, Roshan, Lahiri, Ashfaq
Beheaded by the sword of tyranny.

(iii) Ashfaqulla

(Born on 21.12.1899, Shahjahnpur, martyred on 19 December 1927, Faizabad jail.)



This carefree poet too embraced the gallows in a state of ecstasy. A comely, stout, tall youth. He had become a little weak in jail though he revealed its secret, that it was not due to worry but since he was meditating most of the time while dwelling on God, he ate very little. A day before his martyrdom, he said that next day was his wedding day. He was hanged at six in the morning. Carrying the Holy Koran like 'Hajj' pilgrims, reciting the holy scriptures, he walked in style towards the scaffold. Ready then, he kissed the rope.

Then he said, "I have never drenched my hands with anyone's blood and I shall be rightly judged by the Almighty. All the charges leveled against me are false". While he uttered 'Allah' the rope was pulled. His last message sent on 16 December 1927 from Faizabad jail, "We have played our roles on the stage of Mother India, right or wrong, whatever we did, we did it only for the sake of attaining freedom. Whether our own leaders praise or condemn us, our enemies, at least have been constrained to appreciate our courage and bravery. Some people call us terrorists. This is false. If it was so, so many of our comrades have been moving freely, but none had harmed even those who have worked against us. We don't believe in vendetta. We aim at liberation of the country by revolutionary means.

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Ghadrite Martyrs' list in Bhagat Singh's hand
is given at back page →

Names of the people hanged in 1915 (Ghadar Party Case)

Names of the people hanged in 1915 (Ghadar Party Case)	Hanged in
1. Kartar Singh	Lahore Jail
2. Jagat Singh	Do
3. Harnam Singh	Do
4. V. G. Pingley	Do
5. Bakshish Singh	Do
6. Surain Singh	Do
7. Surain Singh II	Do
8. Uttam Singh	Do
9. Ishar Singh	Do
10. Ranga Singh	Do
11. Bir Singh	Do
12. Arur Singh	Do
13. Dhian Singh	Do
14. Chanda Singh	Do
15. Jivan Singh	Do
16. Dhian Singh II	Do
17. Jagat Singh II	Do
18. Chanda Singh II	Do
19. Kamshi Ram	Do
20. Gandha Singh	Do
21. Balwant Singh	Do
22. Arur Singh	Do
23. Banta Singh	Do
24. Atma Singh	Do
25. Harnam Singh	Do
26. Kala Singh	Do
27. Chandan Singh	Do
28. Prem Singh	Do
29. Inder Singh	Do
30. Dr Mathura Singh	Do
31. Bata Singh of Ludhiana	Do
32. Jwand Singh of Hoshiarpur	Do
33. Lal Singh — hanged in Ferozepur	Do
34. Lachhman Singh	Do
35. Bata Singh	Do
36. Indra Singh	Do
37. Indra Singh II	Do
38. Badh Singh	Do
39. Mota Singh	Do
40. Bhagat Singh	Do
41. Vadhawa Singh — unknown	Do
42. Gujar Singh	Do
43. Tara Singh	Do
44. Jetha Singh	Do
45. Abdulla — unknown	Do
46. Harnam Singh	Do
47. Niranjan Singh	Do
48. Narain Singh	Do
49. Pala Singh	Do
50. Chahiba Ram	Do
51. Sohan Lal	Do
52. Balwant Singh	Do
53. Ram Rakha	Do
54. Amli	Do

List of Martyrs of Ghadr movement on the front page of the Judgement of Lahore Conspiracy Case, 1915: Personal copy of Bhagat Singh exhibited at Khatkar Kalan Museum

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5. Bakshish Singh	Do
6. Surain Singh	Do
7. Surain Singh II	Do
8. Uttam Singh of Ludhiana	Do
9. Ishar Singh	Do
10. Ranga Singh	Do
11. Bir Singh	Do
12. Arur Singh	Do
13. Dhian Singh — I	Do
14. Chanda Singh	Do
15. Jivan Singh	Do
16. Dhian Singh II	Do
17. Jagat Singh II	Do
18. Chanda Singh II	Do
19. Kamshi Ram	Do
20. Gandha Singh	Do
21. Balwant Singh	Do
22. Arur Singh	Do
23. Banta Singh	Do
24. Atma Singh	Do
25. Harnam Singh	Do
26. Kala Singh	Do
27. Chandan Singh	Do
28. Prem Singh	Do
29. Inder Singh	Do
30. Dr Mathura Singh	Do
31. Bata Singh of Ludhiana	Do
32. Jwand Singh of Hoshiarpur	Do
33. Lal Singh — hanged in Ferozepur	Do
34. Lachhman Singh	Do
35. Bata Singh	Do
36. Indra Singh	Do
37. Indra Singh II	Do
38. Badh Singh	Do
39. Mota Singh	Do
40. Bhagat Singh	Do
41. Vadhawa Singh — unknown	Do
42. Gujar Singh	Do
43. Tara Singh	Do
44. Jetha Singh	Do
45. Abdulla — unknown	Do
46. Harnam Singh	Do
47. Niranjan Singh	Do
48. Narain Singh	Do
49. Pala Singh	Do
50. Chahiba Ram	Do
51. Sohan Lal	Do
52. Balwant Singh	Do
53. Ram Rakha	Do
54. Amli	Do

Note: The above List had been prepared by Shukh Bhagat Singh in his own hand

Readable version of the List (overleaf)

8

‘REPUBLICAN’ TO ‘SOCIALIST’ REPUBLICAN

Since by Sept. 1925 all the front rank leaders of HRA had been arrested, it was left to the younger lot to carry forward its mission. In these efforts, new comers like Shiv Verma, Jai Dev, Bijoy Kumar Sinha, Surendra Pandey as also Bhagat Singh, Sukh Dev from Punjab joined. It was felt by the younger lot, that they had to rebuild the party from a scratch, not only with regard to its membership but also in respect of its ideology and organisation.

As it transpired, their efforts to effect the jail breaks, to free Ram Parshad Bismil in the first place and later Jogesh Chatterji, provided them an opportunity to introspect about all aspects of the movement. This entailed an extensive study of the history of revolutions, including the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the writings of revolutionaries of all the hues. Events moved much faster after the release of Bhagat Singh from bail bonds in Feb. 1928 which enabled him to move freely and actively participate in establishing a new setup to carry forward the legacy of the movement.

Ferozepur centre

Ferozepur was selected as a centre with a specific objective in mind. From the way it was set up and utilized, it appears that it was to serve as headquarter for the new party, which was yet to be formed. It was set up on 10 August 1928 and was wound up in first half of February 1929. By that time the centre of activities had shifted to Agra with the focus on bomb making. Almost parallel to Ferozepur, a sub-centre was also run at Amritsar from middle of August to early November 1928, where a room on the first floor of a house in Mughal Bazar was rented by one Sunder Das (Sukh Dev). It remained with Sunder Das from 16.8.28 to November 1928 (P.W. 197, Ram Sahai).

Lahore — the hub

The Tribunal in its final judgment dated aptly 7.10.1930 observed:

“Turning now to Punjab, accused Sukh Dev, who had his headquarters at Lahore, was engaged in enlisting recruits for a revolutionary party in 1926. Approver Jai Gopal (P.W. 2) was at the National School, Lahore, which was closed down towards the end of that year. While at that school, he came to know Sukh Dev through Yashpal, absconder, who was working as a master in that school. In November 1926, Jai Gopal agreed to join Sukhdev’s secret society. Another recruit of Sukh Dev was Hans Raj Vohra (P.W. 5) who was related to Sukh Dev and with whom Sukh Dev began to discuss politics in August 1926.... During 1927, activities of Sukh Dev do not appear to have been considerable but he was in touch with Bhagat Singh. In May or June 1927, Jai Gopal at the instance of Sukh Dev rented the house of one Kanaya Lal (P.W. 61) in Gawal Mandi, Lahore and the house was visited not only by Sukh Dev but also by Bhagat Singh in the summer of 1927.”¹

Over to Delhi — Kotla Ferozeshah meeting



Ferozeshah Kotla Fort, Delhi

Before Bhagat Singh the aim of revolutionaries was primarily

the freedom of the country. Till then they were not clear about the purpose of this freedom. Will the purpose of freedom be served by replacing the Viceroy by some Indian occupant? Will people be able to enjoy the freedom in real manner when inequality and exploitation of man by man in society continues? The revolutionaries were not clear about who would form the government after independence and what would be the shape of the future society and other such questions. It was Bhagat Singh, who first of all emphasised these issues among the revolutionaries and put forward socialism as the goal of the party. He said that the struggle for political freedom of the country was only the first step towards the goal and if we stop there our campaign would remain tame. In absence of social and economic changes freedom would be restricted to a few people only: Only the reorganization of the society on the principles of eradication of exploitation and inequality can ensure all-round development of the country.

Socialism was the cry of the era. First of all Bhagat Singh perceived and recognized this voice. Here he was above his other companions.

Moreover till then there was no single revolutionary organization at national level; in Bengal there were, Anusheelan, Yugantar, etc., organizations, Punjab had its party and mostly Hindustan Republican Association (HRA) was active in UP and Bihar. Even having equal claim upon the legacy of martyrs there was no link among them: Bhagat Singh and most of his comrades wanted to establish a countrywide organization by joining together all of these organizations. For this purpose in 1928 a meeting of the representative revolutionaries of all the provinces was held at Delhi in which ten representatives from UP, Bihar, Punjab and Rajasthan had participated. Most of the revolutionaries of Bengal were in jails at that time. When those who were out, were contacted, they did not agree with the adoption of socialism and democratic organization. They had refused to participate in the meeting.

The Delhi meeting was in a way, led by Bhagat Singh and on his suggestion socialism was declared as the goal of the party and its name Hindustan Republican Association was replaced by Hindustan Socialist Republican Association. The second important decision of the meeting was the democratization of the organization, rejecting the idea of a single person dominating the movement and

leaving everything to his whims. Hence a central committee was formed to run the organization and it was considered supreme in policy matters. In this meeting Sukh Dev, Phonindra Ghosh, Kundan Lal and Shiv Verma were elected as organizers for Punjab, Bihar, Rajasthan and UP, respectively. Bhagat Singh and Vijay Kumar were given the charge of publicity and inter-provincial coordination: These six people and Azad formed the Central Committee.

Jai Dev Kapoor, Surinder Nath Pandey, Braham Dutt Mishra and Manmohan Benarjee from Bihar had also participated in the meeting.

The tradition of electing the commander of the party was started and Azad was the first elected commander: Azad could not attend the meeting due to eye trouble, but Bhagat Singh and Vijay Kumar had already consulted him and he had agreed to all their suggestions.

Moreover, prior to this, a considerable part of the strength of the revolutionaries was frittered away in killing of approvers, informers, officials of the espionage system and in dacoities for collecting funds. It was deemed as counter-productive. In this connection also a specific policy was adopted at Delhi. About money it was decided that the party would lay our hands only on government cash. Besides, as a rule only such 'actions' would be chosen which would directly be connected with the political problems of the country.

1928 was an important year from the point of view of political scenario. The countrywide strikes of workers were organized on a big scale. The ominous shadow of the economic crises of the international capitalism had fallen on India also due to which peasants, middle class people and national capitalist class were also agitated. To give relief to the hard pressed capitalists of England the British government of India raised the value of a rupee from one shilling four pence to one shilling and six pence. In this way the English merchants and industrialists earned a profit of lakhs of rupees at one go. On the other side the protection to Indian steel industry was withdrawn and the way for import of English steel was opened. The Indian capitalist class was also directly hit. To cope up with this nationwide discontent, the British assured some reforms and announced the formation of Simon Commission. All the members of this commission were Englishmen. Almost all the parties in India opposed this hundred per cent English Commission.

Still the Commission arrived. The country boycotted it. The people observed strikes against its arrival and hoisted black flags with “Simon go back” slogans. The English government did not care a fig for it and the Commission was put in place over people’s heads. This was an insult to their Indian-ness.

H.S.R.A. decided to pursue the Simon Commission in Northern India. When it came to Delhi Bhagat Singh, Batukeshwar Dutt and Jai Dev Kapoor tried to reach near the Commission for which they wandered in Delhi but they could not see even the shadow of it. At that time these comrades had only revolvers and pistols. On the experience of Delhi we concluded that the provision of bombs was necessary for success.²

Bhagat Singh said that as he would be coming to Calcutta at the time of Congress session and that he and Phonender would look about for some bomb-maker together: The latter gave him the contact-address of Kanwal Nath Tiwari, who at that time was studying in Calcutta at the Vidyasagar College and lived in Arya Samaj Mandir.

B.K. Sinha mentioned that the party had no funds and suggested organising dacoity to raise money. He suggested that it should be done in Bihar as no action had taken place in that province. Phonendar was asked to suggest some place and he proposed Bettiah for the purpose. B.K. Sinha asked if he had any particular house in mind and Phonendar replied that he had not yet chosen one. It was decided that within 11 or 12 days, Bhagat Singh would come to Bettiah and that he and Phonendar would identify a suitable place for dacoity. Bhagat Singh said that he would come to Bettiah wearing a Bengalee dress, cutting his hair, beard and moustaches. He was told not to cut his moustaches as that would give rise to suspicion as it was not in vogue there in Bihar.

During the meeting a ‘chaprasi’ of the fort came there. He asked what they were doing there. Sukh Dev and Bhagat Singh replied that they were students and had come there to study. They had with them some books and newspapers.

[Note: Presumably it was Bara Singh — P.W. 420, who appeared as a witness on 16.8.1930.]⁶

A low key affair

The Delhi meeting was over without any fanfare, yet it set into motion a chain of events at a much faster pace than ever before. It

took quite some time for the government and even political parties to realise the full import of H.R.A. becoming H.S.R.A.

A careful perusal of its proceedings which were revealed to the government only by a rank insider Phonendra after becoming an approver. A Central Committee was constituted, five ‘actions’ were to be undertaken, of which except the intended attack on Simon Commission, the rest were in no way distinguishable in kind from those undertaken by its precursor H.R.A.

Also on the face of it, there was no elaborate ideological document like the ‘Revolutionary’, nor any organisational draft like the Constitution of H.R.A. Interestingly as we shall find later, during police raids and recoveries, numerous copies of both such documents of H.R.A. were recovered from the HSRA centres. This could not just be incidental; the H.S.R.A. cadres must have found them valuable as their guides.

On the propaganda front too, H.S.R.A. was committed to study and propagate the deeds of martyrs of India as also the past revolutionary movements of the country, just like H.R.A.

But, what was path-breaking ideology-wise, was the adoption of Socialism as a goal equal in importance to independence. No doubt the ‘*Revolutionary*’ also contained reference to “equal real opportunity to every man be he high or low, rich or poor”. Also on judicial record is a document recovered from Yogesh Chatterjee upon his incidental arrest in Calcutta on 18 October 1924, which alludes to preaching social revolutionary ideas and communistic principles.”³

“Yet the fact remains that Delhi meeting concluded without issuing any formal document in the nature of a ‘manifesto’. As for the Manifesto of H.S.R.A. as such, it became ‘manifest’ only in December 1929.

However, Naujwan Bharat Sabha and later H.S.R.A. came out with a more sharply defined ideology and a line of action that we are detailed in the following four writings which are widely considered to be of long term historical significance.

- (1) *The Manifesto* of the Naujwan Bharat Sabha, Lahore, 1928.
- (2) *The statement* made by Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt during the Assembly Bomb Case trial, April 1929.
- (3) *The Manifesto* of H.S.R.A. issued at the time of the Lahore session of the Congress, December 1929.

and (4) *The Philosophy of the Bomb*, 26th January 1930.

There is little doubt that out of these four documents, as many as



three were authored primarily by **Bhagwati Charan Vohra**; While, he wrote the Sabha Manifesto he was its Propaganda Secretary, but he had no role in the formation of H.S.R.A. This happened because the leading figure of the party in Punjab, Prof. Jai Chander Vidyalankar had levelled baseless charge of Bhagwati Charan Vohra being a C.I.D. man out of sheer malice and jealousy. As a result he remained out of the party from September 1928 to November 1929: Yet, paradoxically this while the party continued to rely on him and his wife for vital support

in critical situations even at the risk of their own lives. His role in the movement, besides the contribution of his better half, the esteemed 'Durga Bhabhi' is equally remarkable.

Significantly the last two documents in the series, namely the *Manifesto of H.S.R.A. and Philosophy of the Bomb* were written exclusively by B.C. Vohra whence most of the H.S.R.A. leaders were in jail. None of them ever differed from their contents either then or later. This should go a long way to show the kind of bonds that had developed among its members and associates. How far they understood and relied on each other can best be understood than described.

In the ultimate analysis, their remarkable success in fulfilling the tasks set before them in September 1928 that too in a historically short period of two and a half years was not possible without such sublime companionship.

An aside:

Lahore Conspiracy starts in 1924 with H.R.A.'s formation. The F.I.R.:

"The complaint is filed under section 121, 121A, 122 and 123 of Indian Penal Code.

The complainant respectfully sheweth:

- I. That the accused above mentioned along with others have at Lahore and other places in British India at various times and occasions **commencing from the year 1924** and continuing up to the present time of their arrest been engaged in a conspiracy to wage war against His Majesty the King

Emperor and to deprive him of the sovereignty of British India and to collect men, arms and ammunitions for or otherwise to make preparation for the said object and purpose.

- II. They further concealed the existence of a design to wage war against the King Emperor intending by such concealment to facilitate or knowing it to be likely that such concealment would facilitate the waging of such war.
- III. With these objects as mentioned in paras I and II above these accused along with others formed a party known as the **Hindustan Republican Association** and held their meetings at Lahore and other places in British India with a view to overthrow by force the Government established by law in India and to establish a Federated Republican Government in its stead."⁴

References:

- 1 *The Hanging of Bhagat Singh*, Vol. I, Malwinder Jit Singh Waraich and Dr. Gurdev Singh Sidhu, Unistar Books Pvt. Ltd., Chandigarh, p. 96.
- 2 *Reminiscences of Fellow Revolutionaries* by Shiv Verma, Translated and edited by Malwinder Jit Singh Waraich and Madhvi Kataria Dhaumya, Unistar Books Pvt. Ltd., Chandigarh (2013), pp. 22-25.
- 3 *Hanging of Ram Prasad Bismil: The Judgement*, (Ed.) Malwinder Jit Singh Waraich, Unistar Books Pvt. Ltd., Chandigarh.
- 4 Malwinder Jit Singh Waraich and Dr. Gurdev Singh Sidhu, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

9

THE PLUNGE

About the middle of September 1928, Bhagat Singh and Sukh Dev went to Lahore and stopped at Ferozepur and on that occasion Bhagat Singh got his hair and beard cut as deliberated at the Delhi meeting.



“Towards the end of September, Bhagat Singh arrived at Bettiah to meet Phonendra there and discussed a proposal for dacoity.

“Towards the end of September also Shiv Verma visited Gaya Prasad’s house at Ferozepur and stayed there for about a week. He had the book P. 364 (Manufacture and use of Explosives) with him and was also engaged in writing articles for the ‘Phansi issue’ of *Chand* magazine; from Ferozepure he left for Amritsar.

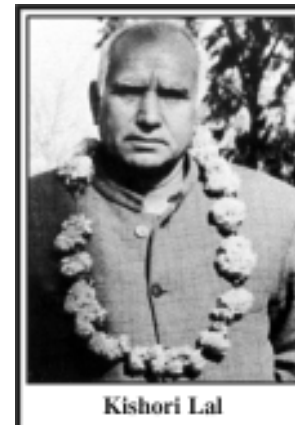
“Bhagat Singh on his way from Ferozepur to Bettiah appears to have stopped at Allahabad where he met Lalit Kumar Mukerjee and Bijoy Kumar Sinha at Ajoy Ghosh’s place. On this occasion he had some talk with Mukerjee and told him that a revolutionary party had been formed comprising two groups, one of which would include active members and the other would have sympathisers.

“On his arrival at Bettiah, Bhagat Singh, accompanied by Azad, had a meeting with Phonendra and Man Mohan Banerji. The proposal to commit a dacoity at Bettiah or elsewhere in Bihar at that time was not considered advisable, but Bhagat Singh obtained from Phonendra some revolvers which he arranged to send to Agra for use at the time of the proposed rescue of Yogesh Chandra Chatterjee.

“Towards the end of September, B.K. Sinha and Azad were at Jhansi and were put up there by Ram Dulare (P.W. 288) with whom Kundan Lal (one of the accused) was living at that time. The witness

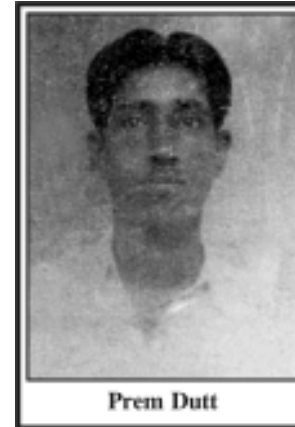
Ram Dulare was an old acquaintance of Kundan Lal and had been in jail with him in connection with certain political activities in 1922. The house of Ram Dulare at Jhansi subsequently became a place of retreat of some of the members of the party.

“During October 1928, the activities of the party were not, so far as it is known, important.



“At that time, **Prem Dutt** and **Kishori Lal** were living in quarters at Guru Dutt Bhawan at Lahore. But Prem Dutt at any rate was not then a member of the party.

“Sukh Dev was also a visitor at Guru Dutt Bhawan both of Kishori Lal and Prem Dutt. On 9th October, Sukh Dev was at Ferozepur and sent Jai Gopal with a message to Shiv Verma at Amritsar. On 10th October, Mahabir Singh left Bharat Motor School at Lahore and was sent to Ferozepur by Shiv Verma for treatment by Dr. Gaya Prasad alias Dr. Nigam, he being ill at that time. He spent two weeks at Ferozepur and while he was there, Sukh Dev paid another visit.



“Mahabir Singh’s business at Ferozepur, apart from his treatment was to make arrangements for a projected visit of certain men from U.P. on their way to Lahore. Ferozepur being located on the mainline from Lahore to Delhi, served as the transit place for comrades coming from Delhi, U.P. and beyond. Here they used to change their dress as per the locale.”¹

Simon Commission at Lahore

On 30 October 1928, Simon Commission visited Lahore. An account of the protest demonstration organised by Naujwan Bharat Sabha and led by Lala Lajpat Rai and Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya ji. By Yashpal, who was present on the occasion:—

“Youngmen, in order to protect their aged leader Lala Lajpat Rai, had made a ring around him while holding an umbrella



J.A. Scott

over his head.

“Finding this protective ring around Lala ji impregnable, Superintendent of Police **Scott** ordered a lathi charge on that cluster. A.S.P. Saunders himself with a cane in his hand let loose his band of constables on this group of youngmen, he himself also joining the assault. Some blows fell upon Lala ji’s head which smashing the umbrella hit him on his chest.

“Lala ji, undaunted by the assault on him at the old age of 63, addressed a protest meeting held in the same evening near Mori Gate, Lahore. He roared: “I declare that the blows struck at me will be the last nails in the coffin of the British rule in India.”²

Lala ji breathed his last on 17 November 1928. Everyone attributed the death to the lathi charge of 30th October.



Injured Lala Lajpat Rai

Going by the shape of injury marks on Lala ji’s body as depicted in the well-known photograph of his bare chest taken soon after the lathi charge, as also according to the description of the injury by the treating Dr. Dharamvir, Yashpal’s account alleging lathi blows landing on the umbrella being held over Lala ji’s head (and due to the strong impact of the blow on the umbrella) causing injuries on Lala ji’s chest seems plausible.

Raja Ram Shastri, the librarian of Dwarka Das Library was a devotee of Lala ji who remained close to him till his demise,

narrates:

“Deep mental shock — traumatic

“Leaving aside the lathi blow injuries on his chest, its mental shock had become unbearable for him. Afterwards, whenever he narrated the happenings of that day, he used to lament, “Today the fate of our nation had sunk so low that a juniormost policeman of the British government could dare to assault the most esteemed of the esteemed persons, so brutally and get

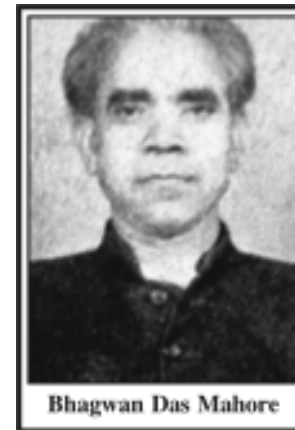
away with it, so nonchalantly”, visibly pained and provoked.³

At the end of the day, however, the death of Lala ji on 17 November 1928 was attributed to the indiscriminate lathi charge and was deemed as gross national insult by one and all. To Bhagat Singh and his comrades all that happened was a national insult not to go unavenged.

In the month of December 1928, events moved fast.

An aside

Now an ‘anecdotal’ account by **Bhagwan Das Mahore** who had been called from Gwalior to Lahore those days:



Bhagwan Das Mahore

“During December 1928, I came to Lahore where I met some of my friends from U.P., some new friends from Lahore besides Hans Raj Vohra and Jai Gopal, the last two having later turned approvers. Of these two, I had attempted to kill Jai Gopal during my trial at Jalgoan in 1929: He survived, and I was awarded transportation for life for an attempt to murder. Hans Raj Vohra was Bhagat Singh’s favourite. One day he came nicely dressed perhaps for college. He called

from downstairs. Bhagat Singh said to me, ‘Kailash, just go down and bring the cycle up’. I happened to be then in upbeat mood. I said, ‘Who is this, the scion of a Lord who can not bring up his own cycle?’ Bhagat Singh sensing my mood relented: Perhaps he then asked Raj Guru to do the needful. Meanwhile, Bhagat Singh said to me, ‘*Hunuman ji*, what has befallen on your lot; I did not do it myself only because I am too well-marked’. Vohra then came up. He was quite good looking. Sensing my appreciative gaze fixed on him, Bhagat Singh said, ‘Now you would be thinking you should have rather agreed to do as I desired. Is that not true?’ I said, ‘Yes, word by word’. Bhagat Singh in his sarcastic style said, ‘Right now, you must sing to us, even if we are unwilling to listen, just to make up for your angry mood. Well! Now go ahead. Hurry up, since we have something important to talk about. Vohra too joined asking me to sing, saying, ‘Yes, brother, please do sing; I learn that you sing very well.’ Bhagat

Singh was quite shrewd in sensing my mood. Indeed I did want to sing but said, 'Is this the way to ask someone to sing? I am not in a mood to sing' said I. Bhagat Singh said, 'Stop this drama and start singing at once'. 'But how could I?' Bhagat Singh kept on nagging me, ultimately provoking me to give him a fist blow. A scuffle followed. Now as per the saying 'weak in body, high in temper, invite thrashing'. I earned a high return of beatings. Ultimately other comrades proposed a compromise. Bhagat Singh said, 'Kailash is the aggressor; whereas I have acted in self-defence. So I accept the truce, but terms shall be dictated by me'. Further, 'My truce terms shall be that Kailash would sing that Marathi song '*Kutha gun thal*'" which he sings often'. Others too supported him. There was no better way for me to become friendly with them all. Bhagat Singh sat with his back towards me. When I objected, he said, 'Excuse me; I withdraw my terms of truce. If I were also to look at your face while listening to the song, I withdraw my offer'. Everyone laughed.... Since that day I got nicknamed '*Kutha gun thala*' in Lahore. Both Vohra and Jai Gopal had mentioned only this 'name' to police and this was my identity in the absconder's list.

"Later a meeting of the Central Committee was held in the Mozang house on 9th or 10th December 1928 to take proper decision about party's operation... which was attended by Azad, Bhagat Singh, Sukh Dev, B.K. Sinha and Kundan Lal. This meeting at the instance of Azad took the decision to avenge the insult to the nation and teach a lesson to the perpetrators of this crime and insult. Scott, the Superintendent of Police, Lahore was 'sentenced to death.' Azad took command of this operation. Jai Gopal... was put on duty to watch the route and note the office timing of Scott."³

"In the evening of 16 December a public meeting was to be held to pay tributes to Kakori Martyrs in Bradlaugh Hall, Lahore in which their portraits were to be displayed with the help of magic lantern. Later, after emerging out of the hall, moving along the road we came across posters of the film 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'. Bhagat Singh's proposal was that this film which portrayed the cruelties perpetrated on the Negro slaves in America and their revolutionary struggle for liberation, must be seen. But what about the ticket money? Now as per the practice, each

comrade was given 4 annas (1/4 rupee) per meal. From this princely amount, one managed a sumptuous meal plus peanuts. I had been entrusted with 1½ rupees for dinner and next day's lunch for three comrades. Bhagat Singh asked for this amount from me. But how could I part with this amount since Pandit Ji had given it for food. Bhagat Singh got too disturbed, delivered us a sermon on the value of art in life. When I made a mention of 'discipline', I was made to listen to his lecture against it. While talking all this, we were proceeding towards the particular cinema hall. Eventually Bhagat Singh threw a challenge saying, "Now if you are adamant, I shall snatch this money". Since I too desired to see the movie, I said, "Now, let us not create a scene in public view. You take the money. But it is understood that you are forcibly taking it from me". Bhagat Singh said, "Let it be so, and moreover, I am also forcing you to buy three 4 anna tickets". I agreed but at the ticket window there was such a big crowd of hooligans, jostling and pushing, that I could not access the booking window. Bhagat Singh, like a seasoned coach, sent me again and again giving me tips for success, but all in vain. He felt much annoyed. Now I too got fed up and said, "Now I won't go. Go if you like". Bhagat Singh took off his coat, rolled up shirt's sleeves and dashed to the window: Unable to get 4 Anna tickets, he purchased 8 *Anna* tickets instead and next day's breakfast too was also gone.

"Yes, we saw the film. It was great. In between Bhagat Singh, in order to tease me, would say "Come on, let us leave," making fun of my being 'disciplined'. On return, to our room Bhagat Singh delivered such a fine discourse on the merits of the film and its value for the revolutionaries that even Azad did not take a notice of the amount of money spent on it, and we got 'advance' payment for our next morning meal as well. Bhagat Singh, smilingly, winked at me!

"Next morning, Azad got some '*nan*' (baked bread) and *gur* (jaggery) for his breakfast. That Azad should consume *gur* and bread all by himself, Bhagat Singh was not able to 'tolerate'. He took a peace of *gur* from Azad's plate and signalled to all of us to do likewise, which we did. Azad seeing all this, said, "Don't disturb me; I have to do a lot of things. Let me at least eat what I do". Still Bhagat Singh did not surrender the piece

of *gur* in his hands. Azad getting annoyed, threw away the *gur* which fell just near the drain. Then we calmed Azad. He yielded. *Gur* was recovered. Azad started eating again, the dry bread with *gur*. Bhagat Singh said, "Since the *gur* fell near the drain, at least it should have been washed before eating!"⁴

The 'action':

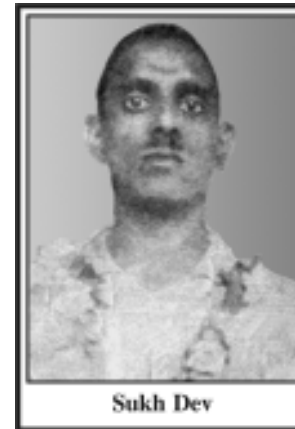
Testified Jai Gopal: "Pandit Ji kept the Mauzer; the revolver was given to Raj Guru and the automatic pistol to Bhagat Singh. These three and myself were to commit the murder. Raj Guru went on foot and we three on bicycles.

"Two bicycles were to be put near the latrine (D.A.V. College) and I was to keep one cycle with me and stand near the Police office. The idea of keeping the cycle near me was that if the first shot at Mr. Scott missed, then Bhagat Singh would take the cycle from me and chase Mr. Scott and shoot him down. Three bicycles were brought from the Mozang House, one by me and the other two by Bhagat Singh and Pandit Ji. I put my cycle near the latrine and went on foot to the D.A.V. compound near the Police Office. One of those (other two) I took and placed it close to my bicycle near the latrine. I returned on foot to the D.A.V. College compound opposite the Police office and taking the third bicycle, which was then there, stood with it on the road. At that time Pandit Ji was in the D.A.V. College compound. Bhagat Singh and Raj Guru were walking about on the road. There was no bicycle with them. It was after 4 in the afternoon. About that time, many D.A.V. School boys passed on the road.



"After this the '*Saheb*' whom I believed to be Mr. Scott came out of the office. A tall Sikh constable in uniform followed him. The constable put something into the hands of the '*Saheb*' and turned towards the office. The '*Saheb*' had started the motorcycle. He moved off slowly. At this time **Raj Guru** and I were quite near and I made the sign to say that '*Saheb*' was coming. On this, Raj Guru took out his pistol and moved towards the '*Saheb*'! I stood at the turning of the road. Bhagat Singh at that time was close to Pandit Ji but outside the gate on the road. **Raj Guru**

fired at the officer as soon as motorcycle reached near him. Raj Guru had a revolver with him. The officer who was hit lifted up his hand from the motorcycle and fell on left side of the cycle. The cycle-engine went on turning. One of the officer's leg fell under the cycle. Bhagat Singh ran towards the officer and fired several shots at him. He had a Brownie automatic pistol."⁵



According to **Sukh Dev**, "Bhagat Singh was to fire first. 'M' (Raj Guru) was sent only to guard Bhagat Singh. Pandit Ji was to guard them both. While escaping Bhagat Singh re(marked) that the '*Saheb*' is not Scott; so he turned towards Pandit Ji to tell him so. Meanwhile 'M' fired which he should not. He never recognized Scott. Then Bhagat Singh was bound to fire at the wrong man. Thus happened the murder of Mr. Saunders."⁶

"As for Scott, he was on official tour on 17th December and had gone to Qasur."⁷

Continues Jai Gopal, "...Bhagat Singh wore a coloured felt cap, warm coat, '*khaki*' nickers, stockings and a pair of black shoes. Pandit Ji wore a '*kullah*' and *pagri* of almond colour, a *salwar*, warm coat and a pair of running shoes; Raj Guru had a folding felt cap like that of Bhagat Singh, cotton coat, pyjamas and a pair of running shoes. I (Jai Gopal) had a turban (*lungi*), warm coat, a pair of black shoes and pyjamas."⁸

"Pandit Ji, Raj Guru and Bhagat Singh then rode through the small gate of the D.A.V. College compound to the Dev Samaj Road. They passed through the wire fence and proceeded towards the secretariat. The three culprits thus got away and eventually arrived at the Mozang House."⁹

They had no money; hence Azad sent Jai Gopal to Bansilal from whom he borrowed Rs. 10/- with which they managed their dinner. While Jai Gopal and Mahavir Singh left with Sukh Dev at 9 PM, Azad, Bhagat Singh, Raj Guru went to the house in Kirpa Ram street, which had been recently rented and where Sukh Dev's mother was staying.

Recollects Mahore: "After the murder, myself, and B.K. Sinha stayed in a different house. Bhagat Singh came to see Sinha. His face

that I saw that day is fixed forever in my mind. There was high emotion written on his broad forehead, which I can not describe. He had come after being a party in the murder of two men. He was upset. His anxiety and unease was showing. He had unlimited respect for human life and its importance and above all its grandeur. No doubt it was Bhagat Singh's proposal that the nation's insult on account of Lala ji's death due to lathi blows be avenged and our meaningful presence be shown to the world. The police terror in the post-Saunders murder days was also visible on the faces of the people of Lahore living in different localities. But we were happy to notice that even black mist of police terror could not eclipse the rays of satisfaction upon avenging the national dishonor on their faces.

"But Bhagat Singh's face, which always showed its emotions, was pitiable. The spectacle of that worshipper of humanity, which I saw on that day, makes my head bow before him most reverentially and I felt that I should lift the dust from under his feet and smear my forehead with it.

"Bhagat Singh and B.K. Sinha sitting in a secluded corner, talked for quite some time late in the night. It was clear that their hearts were heavy. Bhagat Singh's emotions were at the peak. Winding up their talks, they got up and talked to me in a routine manner. I, being bound by party discipline, also confined myself to routine conversation. Yet I still repent for my foolishness for having then reminded Bhagat Singh that the sum of 20 rupees which was borrowed from me on my arrival at Lahore, be returned; otherwise how shall I pay for my hostel. But

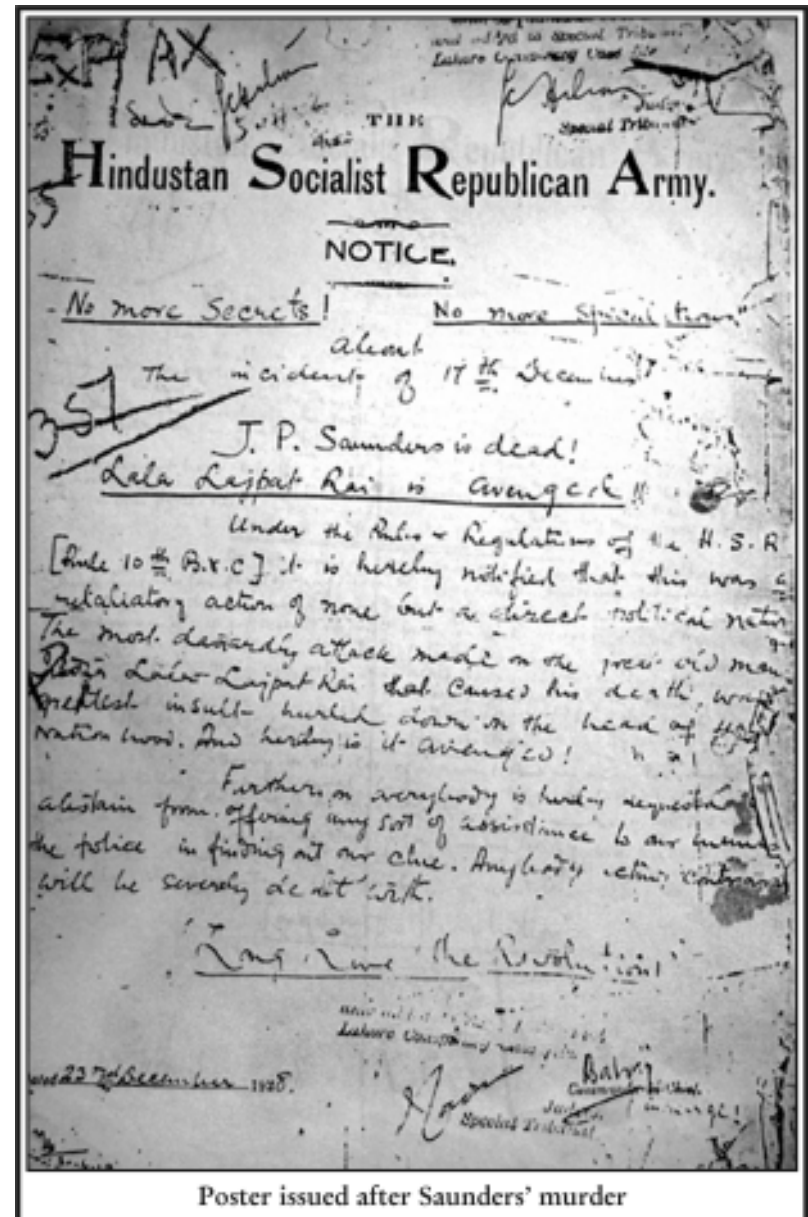
where was the money? Without replying to my query, he 'advised', 'Kailash, don't you ever attempt writing poetry!' Without waiting for my reply, he left saying, 'Your greatest service to the Muse *Sarswati* shall be, by never trying to be a poet!'"¹⁰

"After the Saunders' murder several pink posters, (some of which) were in the handwriting of Bhagat Singh, with the heading 'Saunders is dead, Lala ji is avenged' were found affixed at various public places in Lahore by various persons."¹¹



J.P. Saunders

The posters had been issued by "Balraj, Commander-in-Chief, H.S.R.A."



Poster issued after Saunders' murder

First Information Report

Written statement of Mr. W.J. Fearn, Traffic Inspector:—

"At about 4.25 P. M. I got up from my table in the office to leave for my evening duty. I had just put on my belt and

helmet when I heard Mr. Saunders ASP start up his motorcycle which was standing outside my office. He had just got out of the gate when I jumped down from the office verandah and went towards my motorcycle which was standing behind the post of the office gate. Mr. Saunders reached the lamp pole near the corner where Court street goes off, when two men deliberately stepped into the middle of the road and fired at him. I looked up and ran towards Mr. Saunders, who had swerved to the left on the foot path marked with bricks struck into the ground. I saw two men run up to him and deliberately fire shots at him as he lay on the ground. H.C. Chanan Singh and I ran up. The two men ran into Court street and we ran after them. I was after the man at the left of the road and H.C. Chanan Singh on the right. The man at the left suddenly turned and fired at me and missed, and when I sprang at him, he pulled his trigger again but his weapon misfired. He was armed with a blue barralled automatic pistol. Both men then ran into the D.A.V. College compound by the gate near the principal's house. I called out to H.C. Chanan Singh, "*Andar na jao*" but he ran into the gate. Immediately afterwards I heard a shot and he came out. I called upon some people in a car which came up to the crossing and sent the H.C. off to the office. I ordered Sardar Amar Singh to get me a gun which he did and then went off into the D.A.V. College compound and searched all houses at the rear of the main building. No one here told me they had seen anyone. Several students stated to Mr. Morris D.S.P. who had come around by the main College Gate that the students had come by that route. I accompanied him to the wall of the Dev Samaj College behind the D.A.V. College latrines, when I told him I wished to return as I had hurt my arm, he permitted me to do so. I hurt my arm in falling in the shallow drain on the side of Court street when I was fired at.

I did not get much of a look at either man. The man was about 5 feet 5 inches or so. Medium height, average Hindu complexion, small complete moustaches, thin and short. He was wearing white pyjamas, a warm darkish coloured coat, and a small black Chirsty type of hat.

(Sd) W. Fearn
Traffic Inspector 17.12.29

Steps taken by the police at Thana Anarkali

A telephone message was received at Thana Anarkali to the effect that Mr. Saunders, Assistant Superintendent Police had been murdered and Chanan Singh, Head Constable injured by means of pistol. Thereupon I, the Inspector reached the Police Office. Mr. Fearn, Traffic Inspector gave his written statement in English. It is attached hereto. In view of the statement the offence appears to be one under section 302/120 (B)/109 of the I.P.C.. First information Report under the said sections be prepared and its number intimated to me.

The investigation is going on.

Dated the 17th December, 1928. (Sd/-) Mani Ram
Inspector Incharge A Division.

F.I.R. No.164, charge under sections 302/120(B)/109 of the I.P.C. was prepared at this Thana.

Dated the 17th December, 1928 (Sd/-) Ahmad Ali
Moharrar Anarkali,(in Persian characters)¹²

Interestingly, Inspector Fearn, admitted in the Court as PW 46 that:

"I attended several identifications parades but failed to pick out the two assailants of Mr Saunders."¹³

Killers?

But who were the killers? Is it possible that Police had no clue about the identity of a single culprit of such a broad day-light murder committed in front of the District Police Headquarters, on a thoroughfare, witnessed in part or full by a dozen eye witnesses, half of them were policemen. It is all the more surprising that Bhagat Singh, with this outstanding physique, whose photograph too was with the police since 1927, was also not among the suspects. The police was literally groping in the dark. This is evidenced by indiscriminate arrests of Naujwan Bharat Sabha and Students' Union activists like Hans Raj Vohra, who was released after a few days.

Yet those who had done it were fully aware that they had in fact been seen from different angles by a number of eye witnesses including policemen. Thus they had to take the maximum precautions to conceal their identity and to choose the safest mode of escape from Lahore at the earliest. Railway station was presumably under most keen surveillance of police and C.I.D., including some who had witnessed the occurrence.

Escape from Lahore

For Sukh Dev, the only option to ensure the safe escape of his three comrades was to seek co-operation of Durga *Bhabi* as Bhagwati *Bhai* had gone to Calcutta to attend the Congress Session.

Recalls Durga Bhabi: “When the Saunders’ murder took place my husband was underground because of his warrants in Meerut Conspiracy Case; he used to come at random that too only for a short while. A few days before the murder he had left some money with me saying that it may be needed. This had put me on guard. I was Hindi Lecturer in local Arya. Kanya Vidyalaya; each lecturer had to be on duty every day, turn by turn to remain in the Vidyalaya till all the girls had gone home. On 17th December, I happened to be on this duty. Our bus driver told me that some incident had happened that day, which the police finds



Durga ‘Bhabi’

it hard to cope with. I too was anxious to know more; the driver was asked to go via the D.A.V. College route where the incident had taken place. What all I could see was the crowd of policemen. I came straight to home.

“The next evening Sukh Dev came to me at about 8 p.m. At that time my Sanskrit tutor, *Pandit Ji* was teaching me; not just because we were crazy about the language but it was also a diversionary move to confuse the C.I.D. people. In fact a regular C.I.D. man was our tenant. So Pandit Ji came; *Mullah ji* (Muslim scholar) too was visiting, all this to create a semblance of a scholarly style of life.

“‘No more of your Sanskrit’ said Sukh Dev, as was his wont. So the tutor left. He asked me if some money was available; they were badly in need of it. I replied in the affirmative and gave him the money.

“Again after half an hour he again came and said, ‘Can you take leave?’ Since winter break was due on 21st December, I said, ‘Yes, during the break.’

“‘Break or no break’ said he.

“‘OK’ said I.

“‘You’ll have to leave Lahore and take along your child with

you.’

“‘Yes I will.’...

“Sukh Dev must have made his plans to ensure the escape of the wanted comrades from Lahore, but I was told only that we have to go to Calcutta.

“Next evening he came along with Bhagat Singh and Raj Guru. Till then, I had seen Bhagat Singh with unshorn hair. Sukh Dev asked me if, I recognized them. I shook my head saying, “No *Bhai*.” As for Raj Guru, in fact I had never met him earlier.

“Sukh Dev said with a mischievous smile, “He is the same *Jattu* who had devoured oranges”. He (Bhagat Singh) in fact frequented to our house quite often, each time helping himself to fruit, etc.

“I went back memory lane to recall *Jattu*’s oranges, an episode after which we had nicknamed him as such.

“This is how I got the clue, and then Bhagat Singh gave a hearty laugh, leaving no margin of doubt about his being the *Jattu*. I made food for them; both Raj Guru and Bhagat Singh slept there.

“Raj Guru was then in the guise of a servant, with his bed rolled in a worn out *durrie* and was wearing shabby dress, while Bhagat Singh was dressed in hi-fi style.

“I have never been able to forgive myself for my discourtesy to Raj Guru on the occasion. Sukh Dev and Bhagat Singh dined in style, but Raj Guru on the other hand, having been sent food in a plate, to keep up the façade of his being a servant. But at that time, my mind was struggling with so-many cross currents that I failed to realize that he too was our own near and dear one. He did not utter a word, not even ‘felt’ this apparent discourtesy to him.

“Ultimately we left the house very early on 20th December in a *tonga* before the C.I.D. man could have reached there for his daily routine vigil; Bhagat Singh in his officer like attire – overcoat hat *et al*, with collars of the overcoat pulled up to cover his face, with little Shachi in his lap, also held high to hide his face behind, and Raj Guru in the guise of ‘orderly’ – servant, both carrying loaded revolvers; we thus boarded the train.

Reaching Lucknow we broke the journey for a few hours in the waiting room: Raj Guru parted from there.

A telegram was sent from Lucknow at Sushila *Didi*’s Calcutta

address:

“Coming with brother – Durgawati.”

The recipients were puzzled – which *Durgawati*? Since *Bhabhi* had never been thus called, and which *brother*? Besides, since *Bhabhi* had flatly refused to accompany her husband to Calcutta, who was proceeding there to attend the Congress Session, she was the last one to be expected there on the occasion. She had then excused herself saying that she had to be on her teaching assignment. It was only on their arrival at Calcutta that the mystery was resolved. Bhagwati was rendered dumb with pleasant surprise: Instantly, putting his hand on her shoulders he saying, “Today I have discovered you!”

“Naturally, we were on our guard during our entire rail journey to Calcutta to make sure that we were not being particularly noticed. As for our fellow passengers, we were virtually ‘alone’ in the first class compartment; interestingly the present second class costs just a fraction of the fare for first class of those days. Some odd couple may have travelled for some distance with us; perhaps there was one lone passenger who remained there for pretty long time; he was mostly asleep, getting up off and on, eat/drink and again switch off. All in all, we never felt that we were under observation.

Interestingly, the police version regarding this escape, projected before the Special Tribunal during Lahore Conspiracy Case trial was that Bhagat Singh, Raj Guru had gone by Bombay Mail towards Delhi on 20th Dec. and traveled upto Kanpur, whereas Azad had reached Mathura by train from Lahore on 26th December. Prosecution had produced four railway officials also as *witnesses* (PW; 115, 116, 117, 118) as supporting evidence, ironically ‘proving’ that return tickets having been issued at Lahore for the purported journey. Sukh Dev, in his *marginal* notes on the proceedings file, says that these witnesses were false, who were produced just to support Jai Gopal who had stated the above mentioned particulars, regarding their escape. However, Jai Gopal’s version regarding escape of Azad was correct — that he had left for Delhi on 25th or 26th December with Kishori Lal, Sukh Dev’s mother and sister who later had returned from Delhi. Sukh Dev had confided to Hans Raj Vohra (Approver: PW. 5) in March 1929 that

Bhagat Singh and Raj Guru had left Lahore on 20th December in Second and Third-servant class respectively.

But nobody had any clue regarding the precise *modus operandi* of their escape which remained a top secret till it was revealed by escapees’ close associates, years after 1947.

A wealthy *Seth* Sir Chhajju Ram of Calcutta was imbued with national feelings, notwithstanding his honorific title of *Sir* conferred upon him by the rulers: Not willing to educate Savitri, his daughter, in a Missionary School as per the usual preference, he approached the Principal of Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Jalandhar to depute a tutor with a patriotic outlook to tutor her at home whereupon her Principal Shanno Devi sent Sushila there to fill the slot. *Didi*’s temperament and conduct won over the hearts of the family to the extent that Seth’s wife Laxmi Devi became her fan. This was what made the stay of Bhagwati while he was absconding in Meerut Conspiracy case, and later Bhagat Singh in Dec., 1928, in the safe hideout of their house not only possible but comfortable.

Bhagat Singh, generally kept himself confined to his room throughout the day, venturing out only after dark hours. As an excuse, he faked sickness, and had kept a bottle of ‘mixture’ placed near his bed. In case some ‘outsider’ intruded, a dose of medicine was ‘duly’ administered to the ‘patient’. Another comrade there, was ‘Jhanda Singh’, whose actual name was Jaswant Singh; he had brought his own supply of *Ghee* and *Shakkar* with him. He had ‘deposited’ this sumptuous stock with Sushila *Didi*, lest someone may pilfer it away. But hard-nosed Bhagat Singh was the last person to be put off. Thus the *Roti* sent to him from *Sethji*’s kitchen, was enjoyed by him with liberal doses of both *Ghee* and *Shakkar*, while avoiding the *Dal* sent along with the *Rotis*.

Within a day or two of Bhagat Singh’s arrival at Calcutta, Bhagat Singh came across Jai Chander the omnipresent. He too was there on the occasion of Congress session and was still striving to project himself as one of the leading revolutionaries. Recognising Bhagat Singh, he congratulated and blessed him and while sermonizing him on the need for caution, also ‘forewarned’ him of impending danger, “Look! Bhagwati is here too; be on the look out!”

Bhagat Singh later disclosed to Yashpal that he felt so annoyed as to give him a slap, from which act he refrained only in view of

old age and his being a former *Guru*.¹⁴

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10

AGRA — THE MELTING-POT

On 19 December, 1928, Phonendra and M.M. Banerjee had gone to Calcutta for the Congress Session, and there they met Kanwal Nath Tiwari at his place at Arya Samaj Mandir 19, Cornwallis Street. Phonendra had previously given this address to Bhagat Singh as a means of getting into communication with him at Calcutta. Bhagat Singh met Phonendra through K.N. Tiwari on 25th December.... Bhagat Singh broached the question of finding a person to teach the manufacture of bombs to the members of the party and he and Phonendra then got into touch at Calcutta with Jatin Das. Bhagat Singh appears to have left Calcutta towards the end of December after asking Phonendra and M.M. Banerji to come to Agra towards the end of January 1929. After their activities in Lahore, the leaders of the party were now turning their attention to the manufacture of explosives and selected Agra as a centre for this purpose.¹

While at Calcutta, Bhagat Singh had met Jatin Das in the company of Phonendra in a park on the north side of Kapila Tola Lane, where they held consultations for the preparation of bombs at Agra and gun-cotton at Calcutta.



States Phonendra : “**Jatin Das** agreed to teach them bomb making on Bhagat Singh’s request and promised to give me two bombshells. Bhagat Singh said that Das would have to go to Agra for that purpose. Das mentioned that as it was winter season ice would not be procurable at Agra but could be available at Calcutta and that the preparation of gun-cotton, therefore, could take place at Calcutta itself. Das asked me to look for a suitable place for making gun-cotton. I selected a room in the upper most storey of the Arya Samaj Mandir in which

room K.N. Tiwari was then residing. It was a secluded room.

“Next morning I went to K.N. Tiwari in the Arya Samaj Mandir. I told him about the proposal to make gun-cotton in his room and he agreed. He added that he would also learn gun-cotton making. In the afternoon, Das and Bhagat Singh came to me at my uncle’s house. Das dictated to me the list of the apparatus and the materials required for bomb making. Bhagat Singh gave me Rs. 50/- for purchase of these articles. I took the list to K.N. Tiwari. He and I went to Bonfield Lane in which there are several chemists’ shops. During three or four days we purchased the articles from the shops near the college square. These purchases were made on 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th February 1929.

Continues Phonendar: “To avoid suspicion, we did not purchase all the articles from one shop. We deposited these purchased articles with K.N. Tiwari at Rooms No. 19 and 20, Cornwalis Street in the Arya Samaj Mandir.

“On the appointed day, Bhagat Singh came to the Arya Samaj Mandir and I went that day to Bango Basi College and fetched Das from there. On my way back Das handed me over two bombshells. We went to Arya Samaj Mandir. Bhagat Singh and Tiwari were already there. I handed over two bombshells to Bhagat Singh. Tiwari had brought half a *maund* (18 kg.) ice. The articles stored in room No. 20 were removed to room No. 19. Das began to make gun-cotton and I, Bhagat Singh and Tiwari began to learn how to do it. While the gun cotton was being made, Tulsi, the *Jamadar* came upstairs with a pale of water. He used to see us coming and going. I put the gun-cotton when it was made in my pocket in moist condition.”²

Tulsi, who appeared as P.W. 397 in this trial stated: “One day in January (February) 1929, Tiwari asked me to bring some water.... when I went upstairs with water, I found four men with Tiwari in his room. One of the four men was a recent visitor. Near him was the packing case. This contained ice and on the ice was a china plate. The men were eating *chana*. It was cold in those days and so I asked Tiwari, what he was doing with ice and he said he was ill and was using it on his head.”³

“Towards the end of January 1929, Sukh Dev was busy in the same endeavour. He sent Jai Gopal to Amritsar to take along certain chemicals there and he himself followed. In January also, Bhagat Singh visited Allahabad and met Lalit Mohan Mukerji (M.Sc. student) at the room of Ajoy Kumar Ghosh.

“By this time Agra had become the centre of activity of the party.

Shiv Verma had taken first floor of a house in *Nuri Gate* on a rent of Rs. 5/- per month in November 1928, but these quarters were vacated by the end of January 1929 and at the same time upper floor of another house (No. 1784) in *Hing Ki Mandi* belonging to Bharosi Lal (P.W. 238) was taken on a rent of Rs. 10/- per month by one of the members of the party. Shortly afterwards, Gaya Parshad, who had sold out his medicines and other stock at Ferozepur to Dr. Diwan Singh on 4 February 1929 (P.W. 302) and had come to Agra, took on rent for the party, under the name of Ram Lal, a second house *Nai Ki Mandi* from its owner Narain Parsad (P.W. 248) on 15.2.29 at Rs. 13/- per month. This house was subsequently used for residential purpose by the party and Gaya Parshad was, for the most part, incharge of it until 31 March, 1929, when it was vacated. The Hing ki Mandi house on the other hand was used by the party for the manufacture of explosives.

The life-style:

Bhagwan Das had given a graphic account of his experiences at Agra which he had during his first visit there and later. “In 1928, I was a student of B.A. in Victoria College, Gwalior; I was a boarder. From among the H.S.R.A. till then I knew Azad, Kundan Lal, B.K. Sinha and Surinder Pandey. One day Vishavnath Vaishampayan came to me. Unexpectedly, he took me to Agra. Here in the *Noori Street*, the revolutionary group was putting up in a room on the first floor of a house. When I reached there around midnight with Vishvanath, someone first looked at us from head to toe with a torch and then opened the door. On entering the room, what welcomed me was the barrel of a big revolver. When I moved my eyes away from it I found a young man’s shining eyes staring at me. This youngman was Bhagat Singh, who was on sentry duty. In the light of a dimly lit kerosene lamp, I could hardly recognise him.

“In the room some youngmen who appeared to be students were sleeping in a row on the floor: Newspapers and *dhotis* were their beds. The sound caused by our entry awoke one or two of them: One of these stared at us and before I could identify him, he recognized me even in that dim light.

“We (myself and Vishavnath), had got drenched in the rain on our way to the place. While I was holding my clothes in my hand after taking them off, looking for some-way out, Bhagat Singh took the clothes from me, wrung them and spread these on the rope for drying up. It was

too cold. I was shivering. Bhagat Singh asked me, “A’nt you hungry”? Before I could reply Vishavnath said, “Not exactly. Even if we were... Shall be seen in the morning. Let me burn some coal to warm myself and dry up the clothes”. While he got doing that, I crept close to B.K. Sinha, on the newspaper sheets where he was sleeping. But how could sleep one in the biting cold? Besides, the endless curiosity regarding the purpose of our being called here? For what grave task are these people and who else was here, kept on haunting me.

“Next morning, Bhagat Singh, B.K. Sinha and perhaps Sukh Dev were seen talking, rather whispering to each other in a corner: Quite often their glances fell on me, which made me feel that they were talking about me: This was natural too since I was new to most of them. As per the code of the party, I was not supposed to join in talking or even listening to their talk. I observed that indeed they were talking about me. When I tried to listen, I overheard Bhagat Singh’s comments, “Yes, Darwin seemed to be correct. He may well be the missing link”. Sinha burst into laughter. I was taken aback and turned my gaze towards them with a ‘yes, I understand’ look in my eyes. While Sinha was still laughing, Bhagat Singh turned serious and signalled me to come as gracefully as he could.

“Then I was to be renamed in the party. This was the practice as Azad was called Pandit Ji, Bhagat Singh was called Ranjit. Sinha suggested ‘Hanuman’ or some such name.. Bhagat Singh suppressing his smile said, “No, nothing of the sort. The name should be such that from it one is not recognized”. Bhagat Singh’s subtle humour truly won me over. Finally I was named ‘Kailash’, a name proposed by him.

“Then began the bathing session. Prior to the bath, Bhagat Singh put oil on Azad’s back and vice versa. Then they massaged each other’s hands.... ending in a wrestling bout. Bhagat Singh lifted Azad and threw him on the floor which bruised Azad’s knees! Till then Azad was the strongest person for me! All the same Bhagat Singh could not beat neither me nor Sada Shiv in (hand) grip breaking contest.

“Both Sinha and Bhagat Singh were fond of singing. I enjoyed some sort of esteem at least in this regard. This brought me close to Bhagat Singh, who, otherwise thought of me just a rustic wrestler, who had nothing to do whatsoever, with intellect or ideology etc.

“Even a superficial look at Bhagat Singh’s style showed him to be from an affluent family struggling to get used to wearing dirty torn clothes, and eating ordinary food, unlike others like us who belonged to poorer

families. Our food was such even in appearance, would make hunger vanish. One day, Bhagat Singh enacted a drama of *Nawabi* style of dining. He mimicked nicely, showering superlatives on the meals.... But got up half-hungry! Same day he went somewhere to manage money for some tolerable food and also purchased some utensils, which till then consisted of broken pieces of earthen bowls etc. Later, when once he came to meet me at Gwalior, Azad had arranged a room for us on the first floor of a house in the outskirts of the city. Sinha, Sukh Dev and B.K. Dutt too were there. From the roof of that house a hillock looked splendid in moonlight. Bhagat Singh and Sukh Dev sat on the roof talking in Punjabi, quite loudly in the moonlit night totally oblivious of the fact they were not at Lahore. They went on talking till it was 2-3 A.M. when a sentry on round checked them. They were quite polite yet the sentry left with a threat to summon them to police station next morning.

“Since we had some party literature and weapons in the house, most of the outsiders left for the hill side with all such material. When the policemen came, we humbly apologized to the policeman on behalf of our ‘outsider student friends.’

“These very days a drama was staged by our college students in which I played the role of a villain. When Bhagat Singh learnt of my getting first prize in acting, he said, “*Hanuman* the great! You and acting? Now let some one bring the news of you having topped in a beauty contest”? Thus began Bhagat Singh’s fad of always teasing me as he did to Raj Guru!”⁴

Vishavnath Vaishampayan recalls: “While at Agra, our pastime



ranged from discussing national issues, reading serious books, playing cards at leisure, and sometimes enjoying the sight of the moonlit Taj. Azad, however, went there only once and used to say, “Some ominous feelings overwhelm the visitors there, to which I feel averse.” Bhagat Singh, on the other hand, would get lost in his world of dreams and sit there for hours together in silence. Raj Guru once showed his mettle as a ‘dead shot’ lover. Once when we all were just back from the Taj, he sat down with pencil and paper to compose poetry: He exclaimed after a while “Done! Done! A Couplet!”. Without waiting

for any one to hear, he recited:

Till now, knew not what love was,

A look at the Tomb made my love riot!

“Everyone laughed on hearing loves’ rioting, while Bhagat Singh calmly took out his revolver and handing over to Raj Guru, said, ‘Take it and shoot me or promise never to attempt poetry.’

“We all used to have our turns in cooking. But Bhagat Singh somehow kept himself out of it, offering, instead to wash our clothes. Sukh Dev also joined him on occasions. One day I too joined him. While washing clothes, he kept on narrating events relating to Irish Revolution. Sometime songs were sung — including Hindi, Marathi, Bengali songs. Marathi song “*Raja Kutha Gunthala, Sakhiye to paran*” (wonderful king having a pure soul) was our favourite. Both its purport and tune were so charming that the listener would get mesmerized. The singers included myself, Bhagat Singh, Das and Sinha.

“Bhagat Singh occasionally sang ‘*Mera Rang de Basanti Chola*’ and ‘Heer’ (the love legend of Punjab). He had a melodious voice, though not conversant with the finer nuances of music. Among us the only ‘Aurangzeb’ (puritan) here was Sukh Dev, evincing little interest in songs. Azad liked music but he was attracted more by the wordings of he songs than by their rendering. Quite often, he would recite the first couplet of a Bundhelkhandi poem, but on the way ask me or Bhagwan Das, “Yes, yes, sing this song”. During his last days, whenever he got caught in cross-currents of thoughts and feelings he would ask us to sing, which would somehow soothe his feelings.... Sometimes, all of a sudden, thinking of Ranjit, he would start humming ‘*Mera rang de basanti chola*’. After a long sigh, he would then say, “How fine were the Agra days!...”

“He never considered Bhagat Singh just a party comrade, but invariably his own flesh and blood, and had boundless affection for him. He never wanted to send Bhagat Singh for the Assembly task at any cost: Only upon realising that by his arrest and his statements thereafter, our party’s standing in national politics would touch the apex; and that the people all over the world would realise that Indian revolutionaries are not lagging behind in making supreme sacrifices at the altar of freedom that he yielded. Yet he felt, inwardly, that the party shall suffer an irreparable loss by his departure from the scene.

“After the demise of Bhagwati *Bhai* (May 1930) he, while pondering over the fate of the party had said, “Bachhan, at the time of

Kakori, I was not that mature, but subsequently, when the party got reorganized, among the new comrades Bhagat Singh was a gem. I knew that by his departure, party’s ideological side shall become weak and so it happened. On each step his absence was badly felt. But when I met *Bapu Bhai* (B.C. Vohra), a ray of hope emerged. I was assured that our party shall be restored to the same status, as it was in the days of Bhagat Singh. By and by, the old era was ushered in. Like the assembly bomb action, Viceregal Train Bomb operation was executed. His (B.C. Vohra’s) ‘Philosophy of the Bomb’ seemed to change national political scenario for the better, but by his sudden martyrdom, the same spectre has started haunting me.”⁵

The agenda

“Early in February 1929, L.K. Mukherji met Azad at the room of Ajoy Ghosh at Allahabad and in the middle of February, Bhagat Singh sent Raj Guru to fetch Mukherji from Allahabad to Agra.

“Upon leaving Calcutta, Bhagat Singh had given to Phonendra money for the railway fare for himself and Das to Agra and on 11th February, Phonendra left for Agra being followed a day later by Das who arrived on 14th February. He was received at the railway station by Bhagat Singh who proposed that the party name of Das should be *Master ji*. In the middle of February, they gathered to learn the process of manufacturing bombs from Das. Those present were Bhagat Singh, Azad, Phonendra, Sukh Dev, B.K. Sinha, Shiv Verma, Sada Shiv and L.K. Mukherji. Other members of the party who were in Agra at that time...were Gaya Parshad, B.K. Dutt, Bhagwan Das Mahore and Raj Guru.

“Bomb-making began to take place at the *Hing Ki Mandi* House on the afternoon of 14th February after the preparation of chemicals for the manufacture of bombs.... On 16th February, the process of mixing chemicals in the manufacture of bombs was continued by Das.... On 17th February, Sukh Dev went to Lahore taking with him the second of the two bombshells which had been brought by Bhagat Singh from Calcutta, the intention of Sukh Dev being to get that bombshell replicated at Lahore.... Around 24th February, Bhagat Singh came from Lahore bringing five bombshells from Sukh Dev, while Azad also returned bringing money. Shiv Verma had come back as well. The five bombshells were filled by Shiv Verma, Bhagat Singh, Azad, Phonendra, B.K. Sinha, B.K. Dutt, Gaya Parshad and Raj Guru.... That night Bhagat Singh, Azad and Phonendra left for Jhansi with one

bomb out of the five which had been made. Next morning they visited the house of Ram Dulare (P.W. 288) at Jhansi and met **Sada Shiv**. Together with Sada Shiv (but without Ram Dulare) they took a taxi belonging to Deoki (P.W. 206) and driven by Rama Nand (P.W. 290). They drove some 20 miles out of Jhansi and stopped the car at the side of the road. They left the taxi driver in the car and four men took the case containing the bomb to a hillock at some distance from the road far away from habitation. Bhagat Singh fitted a cap to the bomb and exploded it by throwing down below.⁶



According to the taxi driver Rama Nand (P.W. 290) "After leaving Jhansi, Pandit Ji (Hari Shankar) took the wheel, stopped the car on one side of the road. All the four men alighted and went in the direction of the *jungle* and stream, taking the leather case with them. They returned after an hour or one and a half hours. While they were away I heard a sound like gun fire. Pandit Ji then drove to the Dakhwan *bund* which is another road turning from Lalitpur in the direction of Jhansi. They went to see the bund while I remained in the car."⁷

There was a meeting on 14th February at *Hing Ki Mandi* house to discuss the plan concerning Yogesh Chatterji. The meeting was attended by Phonendra, Bhagat Singh, Pandit Ji, Shiv Verma, Sukh Dev and B.K. Sinha, i.e., six of the seven members of the Central Committee, the seventh member Kundan Lal was not then present at Agra.

It was decided at this meeting that a rescue party should be formed consisting of Bhagat Singh, Pandit Ji, B.K. Sinha, Shiv Verma, Raj Guru, Bhagwan Das and B.K. Dutt. On 15th February, Das made a bomb and on the same day, B.K. Sinha reported that the transfer of Yogesh Chatterji to the Lucknow jail would take place on 16th February. About this time, Bhagat Singh tried to persuade L.K. Mukherji to join the party but he declined; he was sent back to Allahabad.

Interestingly, Jatin Das warned Bhagat Singh that Mukerji may turn a police informer leading to a raid here at Agra. But though this was thought to be unlikely, yet it was felt that in case he fell into the hands of police, he'll disclose all: This is precisely what actually happened as he became an approver upon arrest and deposed as PW 6.⁸

On 16 February, the process of mixing chemicals in the manufacture of bombs was continued by Das while B.K. Dutt was sent to Agra station to ascertain the movements of Yogesh Chatterji and at 6 P.M. he reported that Chatterji had already left by the 5.30 train for Lucknow. It was then decided to assault the lock-up at Kanpur, where it was known that Chatterji would be kept for the night owing to the absence of a night connection with the train to Lucknow. Accordingly, by the 8.30 P.M. train same night the rescue party left Agra for Cawnpore taking with them a pistol, two revolvers and also the bombs which Das had made a day earlier. By the same train Das left for Calcutta.

Sukh Dev and Phonendra locked *Hing Ki Mandi* house. The projected rescue of Chatterji failed because although the party was well armed, they considered the lock-up at Cawnpore too difficult a building for them to penetrate. On 17th February, members of the rescue party returned to Agra.⁹

Bhagwan Das Mahore has narrated the aborted attempt: "We had been specially summoned to Agra for the rescuing since Yogesh was about to be transferred from Agra. We had expected him to leave by 10 P.M. train and we had planned accordingly. But we were informed by B.K. Dutt, who was monitoring the situation at Agra railway station, that he was being taken by 7 P.M. train. So we were helpless. B.K. Sinha asked Raj Guru to travel by the same train keeping in view the fact that the train from Cawnpore to Lucknow was available the next morning and Yogesh would be kept somewhere at Cawnpore during the night. Raj Guru was to identify that place and also to arrange a house with the cooperation of local comrades where Yogesh could be kept after the rescue. We (myself), Azad, Bhagat Singh, B.K. Sinha, B.K. Dutt, Shiv Verma and Sada Shiv left for Cawnpore armed and equipped. Upon arrival there we learnt that no house could be arranged at Cawnpore. On top of it, the purse of Azad was stolen by a pickpocket containing all the cash as also his driving license. Thus the plan was instantly called off by Azad, thanks to his intuitive insight and astuteness. Sada Shiv and I were strolling at the platform carrying the box containing iron cutting tools. Bhagat Singh came to us and with a heavy heart said, "Let us return to Agra. Call back Raj Guru also". In the meantime, we saw Yogesh moving surrounded by a group of policemen around him and his fetters jingling with each of his step. We could not help watching helplessly. Since our Agra train was to leave shortly, Azad signalled to us to be prompt. Sada Shiv called back Raj Guru also.

“The moment we entered our Agra house on our return there, Bhagat Singh who had kept his calm all the way from Cawnpore, without betraying any emotion on his face, suddenly began crying bitterly. Having seen him to be so composed during the long travel, none could have expected the veritable storm of emotions brewing in his heart. This failure left deep scar on his sensitive mind.”¹⁰

The Agra phase of H.S.R.A. was marked by the regular presence of most of its leading functionaries at one place. It was also here that the vital gap in their armoury, namely the bombs was filled up to the extent that they, later, never fell short of this weapon. But what looked much less significant to the prosecution, was the spirit and the insight gained by the revolutionaries by studying a vast spectrum of literature, supplemented with endless formal and informal exchange of ideas involving the interpretation of the contents of the books in the context of the contemporary Indian political scenario.

Of the revolutionaries themselves, Yashpal had made a pointed mention of this dimension of that phase. Writes he, “A number of H.S.R.A. members had been together at Agra for a considerable period of time. Whereas they experimented with bomb here, they also got a chance for exchange of ideas and knowledge, one train of thought, leads to another chain of ideas, while the ideas of the participants get crystallised.”¹¹

He has also listed 23 book, available at Agra:

1. The history of revolutionary struggle in British India: Open & secret
2. The Ideal of Republic
3. 1914-15 Rising
4. Ideal of Equality, Liberty, Fraternity
5. Indian Princes and Revolutionaries (Sarkar's Pamphlet)
6. Turkish Messages to India's Muslim Rulers
7. Berlin Committee and the German Plot
8. Non-cooperation
9. Indistinct Ideal of Independence
10. Failure of Non-cooperation and the Revolutionary Parties
11. Communist Thought
12. Spiritualism
13. Advanced Socialist Thought
14. Communist School of Thought
15. Nehru Report
16. Terrorists and Mass Revolutionaries

17. Anarchism and Socialism
18. Communism
19. Syndicalism and Collectivism
20. The Revolution and the World
21. Modern Breach Loaders
22. Use of Explosives
23. Monopoly or How Labour is Robbed

The range and depth of these elaborate exchanges of ideas can also be gathered from the list of books recovered from **Saharanpur centre** during the police raid there on 13 May 1929. “Agra was abandoned by the party at the end of March. Gaya Parsad was first sent by B.K. Sinha to Saharanpur to obtain a house there and a house was taken by him in the Rani Bazar under the name of Ram Lal from its owner Ram Chand (P.W. 332). Shiv Verma followed Gaya Parsad to Saharanpur but this house was occupied only for a few days. Gaya Parsad (under the name of Ram Nath) took another house in Chob Faroshan Mohalla from its owner Mohd. Hanif (P.W. 207). The packing up of the property of the party at Agra was done by Gaya Parsad and Phonendra and this property was taken to Saharanpur from Agra by Gaya Parsad and Shiv Verma, the latter travelled via Delhi.”¹²

Obviously, the stock of there books had been brought from Agra centre of the party. Out of these 125 ‘articles’ recovered on 13.5.29, around 60 were of politico-historical nature, which are listed below as per their respective serial numbers:

Contrary to a widespread myth regarding Bhagat Singh's exposure to Marxist-Leninist, literature for the first time only after his arrest, whilst he was in jail, the party library had all such literature available at that juncture.

- 3) ‘Ansu’
- 4) ‘Mother Smriti’
- 5) ‘Gandi ka Naji (?) Puttar’
- 6) Anand Math
- 9) Heroes of the air
- 12) How to end war
- 14) Reform or Revolution
- 15) Necolai Lenin
- 17) The coming of Socialism
- 18) I appeal unto Kaiser
- 19) Theory and Practices of Leninism

- 20) What are the Indian States?
- 22) India and the next war
- 23) Digai Mamalik Men Qata Tualqat (Non-Cooperation in other countries)
- 24) And now for Power
- 25) Indian National Congress
- 26) The Slavery of China
- 27) 'Unemployment'
- 28) The Awakening of Indian Youth
- 33) Wage System
- 36) Is India Civilized?
- 40) 'Ruse Ka Kharyantar'
- 42) "Prithvi Udhar"
- 43) 'Zakhmi Punjab'
- 47) Works of Leo Tolstoy
- 48) The women of Knockaloe
- 49) 'The Dawn over the Asia'
- 50) The 'red Shirts'
- 51) 'Bharat Ki Sampatak Avastha'
- 53) Some Recollections. Griffith and his Times
- 54) Labour and Capital in Parliament
- 55) The Motherland and Other poems
- 56) What is the I. W.W.?
- 58) India as a Home of Learning
- 59) Imperialism
- 60) The Politics of Oil
- 61) One Big Union
- 63) Sawadhinta Ke Piyare
- 64) Ireland and the League of Nations
- 65) The Economic Case of Irish Independence
- 66) Soviet Russia
- 67) 'Piracy' by Michael Arlen
- 68) Empire (?) Socialism
- 69) 'Bharti Sashan Padhati' (?)
- 70) 'Hamare Zamane Ki Ghulami'
- 71) Molion (?) Ke Larai
- 74) Heroes of the Navy
- 75) From Dawn to Dusk
- 76) Monopoly or How Labour is Robbed

- 77) The Man Versus the State
- 78) The way of war
- 79) Gandhi V/S Lenin
- 80) 'Bandi Jeewan'
- 81) Russia: The Official Report of the British Trade Delegation to Russia
- 87) The Path to Freedom
- 93) Twelve Days in Germany
- 103) Hindustan Socialist Republican Army Notes
- 106) Report of the Sedition Committee (1918)
- 107) All India Political Sufferers' Conference¹³

References:

- 1 Malwinder Jit Singh Waraich and Dr. Gurdev Singh Sidhu: *The Hanging of Bhagat Singh*, Vol. I, pp. 109-110.
- 2 Malwinder Jit Singh Waraich and Rajwanti Mann: *The Hanging of Bhagat Singh*, Vol. II. (PW. 3. Phonendra Ghosh).
- 3 *Ibid.*, Vol. II (PW. 397. Tulsi).
- 4 Yash Ki Dharohar: (*Hindi*), Bhagwan Das Mahore, Sadashiv Rao Malkapurkar and Shiv Verma, Atma Ram and Sons, Delhi, 1991, P.35-41.
- 5 Malwinder Jit Singh Waraich and Sangram Singh: *Chandra Shekhar Azad — A Biography*, Unistar Books Pvt. Ltd., Chandigarh, 2012, pp. 128-129.
- 6 Malwinder Jit Singh Waraich and Dr. Gurdev Singh Sidhu, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-114.
- 7 Malwinder Jit Singh Waraich and Rajwanti Mann, *op. cit.*, (PW. 290. Ramanand).
- 8 Shiv Verma, *op. cit.*, pp. 104-105.
- 9 Malwinder Jit Singh Waraich and Rajwanti Mann, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-113.
- 10 Mahore, Sadashiv, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-43.
- 11 *Sinhavalokan (Hindi)*, Yash Pal, Lokbharati Prakashan, Allahabad, 1994, p. 138.
- 12 Malwinder Jit Singh Waraich and Dr. Gurdev Singh Sidhu, *op. cit.*, p. 115.
- 13 Malwinder Jit Singh Waraich and Harish Jain, *Hanging of Bhagat Singh*, Vol. III, pp.106-110.

11

THE MASTERSTROKE

During the three month long conclave at Agra after the ‘plunge’ it was felt by most of the party comrades that since Saunders’ murder did not project their image in proper perspective, they sought a more appropriate form of action to fulfil their mission. Those days Bombay’s workers were protesting against the mill owners and were engaged in a militant struggle against them. The Government, siding with the mill owners proposed a Trade Dispute Bill, which provided stringent measures to curb even the routine trade union activities.¹

Says **Shiv Verma**, “Bhagat Singh was a shrewd observer of the political developments in the country. He had been closely watching the country-wide strikes of workers in 1927-28, the affinity of the foreign workers with these strikes and demonstration of international brotherhood of the working class, financial assistance of the English workers to Indian workers, active participation of labour leaders of England in organising the agitation in India, the threats by the Indian Government to suppress the labour agitation with all its might, presentation of the Trade Dispute Bill and the Public Safety Bill in the Assembly with this purpose, the opposition to both the bills by the whole public and all the political parties of the country with one voice. He felt that an unprecedented awareness of the Indian working class signified a new turn in the political life of the country.

“The members of the Central Committee felt that the British Government desired the Bills to be passed by the Assembly to show to the world that these (repressive) laws were made by the representatives of the people. But if these laws were to be implemented, let them be promulgated under the special powers of the Viceroy. Since the Government had become deaf it does not hear the voice raised against these laws all over the country. We shall have to make our voice heard.”²

This feeling of resentment finds an echo even in the newspaper ‘Times’ London: 15.4.1929, ‘Imperial and Foreign News’:

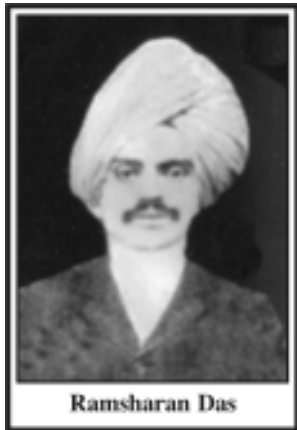
‘THE ASSEMBLY IN DELHI’ SCENE OF BOMB OUTRAGE:

Intense feeling of late has been aroused by agitation against the Government of India Trades Disputes Bill and Public Safety Bill. The former aims at the investigation and settlement of industrial disputes and the latter would enable the Government to deport anti-British agitators: The Trades Disputes Bill contains penal clauses against the utilisation of trade union organisation for the political coercion of the civil authority and the Public Safety Bill is specially directed against agitators endeavouring to stir up anarchical mass movement. They have on these grounds aroused the bitter hostility of political extremists.³

As Sukh Dev had disclosed to H.R. Vohra on 10 April 1928 at Lahore: “the party had decided this (throwing of bomb in the assembly) to show our protest, i.e., the protest of the revolutionary party, against the unjustifiable provisions of the Trade Dispute Bill and the Public Safety Bill that were being discussed there at that time. Sukh Dev also told that the party had no intention to take the life of any person in the Assembly and that for that reason the bombs had been intentionally kept weak....”⁴

To be thrown by whom?

“A lot has been said about the way that the decision to select Bhagat Singh and Dutt for the task was taken, “On suggestion of Bhagat Singh, the Central Committee decided to throw a bomb from the visitors’ gallery towards the Treasury Benches after the voting on the Bills and before the declaration of result of voting on the Bills. The intention of the explosion was to demonstrate the magnitude of displeasure of the public towards the Bills. In other words, their intention was to open the ears of the deaf without killing anyone. The Committee also intended that the comrades, who would go to explode the bomb, should surrender there and after being arrested they would explain the object of their action through the medium of the Court. Bhagat Singh wanted to use the Court as a political platform. But the members of the Central Committee did not approve the proposal. They did not want to lose two members for a single statement. Later they agreed to it.



As per relevant judicial records, a veteran *Ghadrite* **Lala Ram Sharan Das** insisted upon his own-self throwing the bomb in the Assembly, vide his confessional statement before Mulk Raj Magistrate, Lahore on 26.8.1929 (which he retracted later) stating that:

“On the morning of 25th February, 1929 Mr Sukh Dev met me at Lahore and took me to the house in Gowalmandi. When I reached there Sardar Bhagat Singh was also there.... At the time when conversation was going on with Sardar Bhagat Singh, he said

that he wanted to throw a bomb in the Assembly himself. As I had grown weary of life in consequence of the presecution by State and as I entertained a great love and esteem for Sardar Bhagat Singh, and I still entertain the same, and in view of the fact that I did not like idea of a promising youngman like him dying so soon without doing anything, and that as compared to his valuable life. I volunteered my services for the work. Mr. Sukh Dev and Sardar Bhagat Singh strongly opposed me.”⁵

Reminisces Shiv Verma “Bhagat Singh wanted to throw the bomb himself. He believed that he would be able to highlight the political importance of the action in the court better than any of his companions. Though his assumption was correct, but we knew that he would definitely be awarded capital punishment. Therefore, despite our agreement with his opinion, none of us favoured his doing it himself. After much discussion he relented before the majority opinion and the Central Committee approved the names of two other comrades.

“Soon after, Sukh Dev came from Punjab: When he came to know about our decision he was furious. He maintained that none other than Bhagat Singh could fulfil the objective behind the proposed action He did not favour sacrificing two comrades and yet not achieving the desired goal. He discussed the matter at length with Bhagat Singh and both of them agreed with each other. On his demand the meeting of Central Committee was held again. This time Bhagat Singh remained adamant and finally, we were compelled to agree with him. The Committee approved the names of Bhagat Singh and Dutt; that we would lose Bhagat Singh forever after the action, had made all of us very sad”.⁶

Regarding Sukhdev’s talk with Bhagat Singh in this connection, Shiv Verma had written elsewhere:

“Sukh Dev was stubborn in his behaviour; he said some harsh things to Bhagat Singh. “You have become arrogant. You have started thinking that the party depends only on you. You have begun to fear death. You are a coward.” He argued, “When you believe that none else can present the ideas of the party, then why did you allow the Central Committee to take this decision that someone else would go to throw the bomb?”

“The more Bhagat Singh refuted the allegations of Sukh Dev, harsher he became. When Bhagat Singh said, ‘You are insulting me.’ Sukh Dev replied, ‘I am doing my duty towards my friend.’ In the end Bhagat Singh left saying, ‘Don’t talk to me in future.’ On the request of Bhagat Singh, the meeting of the Central Committee was called again. Sukh Dev only sat through the meeting. He did not utter a word. The Committee had to revise its previous decision on the persistence of Bhagat Singh. Sukh Dev left for Lahore the same evening without sharing a word with anyone. According to Durga *Bhabhi*, when Sukh Dev reached Lahore the next morning, his eyes were swollen. He had perhaps wept bitterly. He did not talk to anyone on that day. In the aftermath, he neither showed his weakness before anyone nor he shed a single tear but he had been shaken to the core. He had wagered his best friend to achieve the objective.”⁷

“In order to carry out this plan, a house was rented on the 25 February 1929 at Delhi for the use of party members who had to stay there. This was rented from Ram Saran Das (P.W. 169) and was retained up to the end of March.”⁸

“The *chaubara* of this house had been sublet by one of the tenants Changa Singh on a rent of Rs. 5/- per month. The house was located in Bazar Sita Ram in Hauz Qazi police station area, some 100 yards from the police station. During their stay, one tenant of the ground floor of the house Jugal Kishor (P.W. 173) had stated that three or four young gentlemen who looked like *Babus* occupied the *chaubara*. They lived there for a month. These *Babus* used to place bicycles in front of my doorway and blocked it. I spoke to one of the *Babus* about it and he quarrelled with me.... I complained to the landlord — Two or three days later they vacated the *chaubara*.”⁹

The task of arranging a house at Delhi and of managing passes for his comrades for the assembly was assigned to Jai Dev. He was also to guide them as to the precise moment for action after watching the proceeding of the assembly beforehand.

A personal note

Once in October 1969, both Shiv Verma and Jai Dev stayed with the writer at his college residence at Ludhiana. Jai Dev, when requested to recall the details of this 'operation' narrated the course of events, which were instantly reduced to writing and are being reproduced verbatim.

Narrated Jai Dev: "I was assigned the duty of arranging a house at Delhi and also to obtain passes for them for the Assembly. As it is very common for the landlords to insist upon their tenant being a family man (married) I had to tell the landlady (Mrs. Mukandi P.W. 174) that (Bhagat Singh) was my elder brother, who had just got married and within a few days shall bring *Bhabhi*. Since we had to vacate the first house in Sita Ram Bazar we were desperately looking for an alternative place.

"As far as food was concerned, we used to make friends with *Halwais* (the Milk venders) from whose shops we could take milk on credit to be cleared at the month end, unlike the hoteliers who had to be paid on the spot. I, posing as a third year student of Political Science, made acquaintance with some of the members of the Assembly to obtain the entry passes and also kept on visiting the Assembly to monitor the scenario and the proceedings.

"Then on the fateful day, I came out of the Chamber after collecting (both) their passes, I was standing besides a roadside vender. On hearing the explosion, I burnt the passes. After a while, they were brought out under police escort. They signalled me to push off and so I did. That night I was lying dejected on the bed, the old lady said, "Where is your brother?" I said, "He has gone to fetch *Bhabhi*." We left the house the next day. The landlady who appeared as PW 174 recognized me as the 'Master' as I had introduced myself to her. She corroborated the above version in the court."¹⁰

The 'action plan' had been devised with meticulous precision. As for the dress, Bhagat Singh was to wear a hat to enable him to escape being identified by virtue of his outstanding height and charm. The hat was of foreign make purchased from a shop at Lahore; the shopkeeper Jagan Nath (P.W. 319) who testified this fact during the trial but he

declined to identify the purchaser. (Sukhdev's comments, Vol. II, P.-696).¹¹ Its colour was between green and fawn. His dress as per the recovery memo dated 19.4.1928 in the Civil Lines police station police Sub-Inspector Hergurchet Singh (P.W. 323) was as under:

1. A shirt of khaki drill with pointed collars.
2. A half-pant of khaki drill having two pockets of white long cloth.
3. A coat of dove coloured Gabron check cloth, having three outer pockets and one inner pocket.
4. A pair of long woolen stockings dove colored with garters.

B.K Dutt was wearing Khaki shorts and shirt, and a pale blue coloured coat. (More details of his dress are not available on the judicial file.)¹²

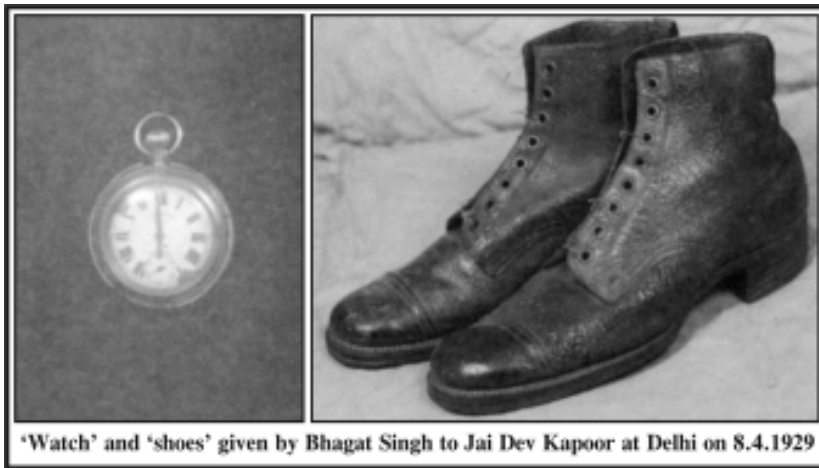
They had, as a prelude to the media publicity thought it fit to be



photographed that too in the attire to be worn on the fateful day to lend it a touch of authenticity. For this purpose, they went to the shop of Ram Nath photographer, Kashmiri Gate, Delhi (P.W. 177) on 3 April 1929, which they visited again on

6th April perhaps to collect the photographs.¹³

The parting gift: When they were just to depart from their house, Jai Dev's worn out shoes caught the sharp eye of Bhagat Singh. He at once proposed the exchange of pair of shoes with him since his pair of shoes were of high quality and in very good condition. According to Jai Dev, this pair of shoes was bought by him when he was to go out of Lahore after the murder of Saunders in the guise of an army officer. Bhagat Singh also handed over to Jai Dev's a pocket watch, which had a historic significance. According to Jai Dev, this watch was bought by *Ghadr* Party in 1915 to mark the time for the start of revolution in India in February 1915. After the failure of the heroic effort, Rash Bihari Bose presented this watch to Sachindra Nath Sanyal, the famous author



of '*Bandi Jeewan*'; Sanyal presented the watch to Bhagat Singh. Jai Dev has preserved these two mementos in *Shahid Samarak Bhawan*, Hardoi, which he had got built there.¹⁴

A touching interlude: Vohras' meet Bhagat Singh

As for Bhagwati and Durga *Bhabi*, though they were not otherwise in picture but they came to know that it was Sukh Dev, the best friend of Bhagat Singh who had virtually compelled the latter to offer himself for the task and who felt like arranging a *last* get together of them all.

"While I, (Durga) was at Sialkot, I received a letter from my husband through a messenger that myself and Sushila *Didi* should straightaway reach Delhi for a day or two. Immediately, we took a bus for Lahore and



therefrom rushed to Delhi travelling overnight, reaching there early morning of 8th April, the day Bhagat Singh and Dutt were to proceed to the Assembly for their 'action' in the forenoon. Well before that, we reached Kadusia Garden where we met Bhagat Singh whom Sukh Dev had brought there: Bhagwati Charan was also there. We had carried with us cooked food which we all shared. *Didi* punctured her finger and stamped the forehead of Bhagat Singh with her bleeding finger, the auspicious *tika* mark.

We were, however, totally ignorant of as to what actually was in store for him and Dutt, except that they were going for some 'action'.

Then, we hired a *tonga* in which myself, *Didi*, Bhagwati along with Shachi got seated and proceeded towards the Assembly hall; Sukh Dev too accompanied us on a cycle. When we reached near the Assembly precincts, there was police and police all around. We then saw Bhagat Singh being taken away in a police van, besides B.K. Dutt whom I had never seen earlier, who also was being taken away but in another van. The moment Shachi, who was in my lap saw Bhagat Singh, he shouted "*Lambe Chacha!*" I instantly shut his mouth. Bhagat Singh too could not restrain himself and he too turned his head to look at us. But in an instant, he was gone."¹⁵

The eventful day

According to **Sgt. Terry**, who was on duty there, "On 8 April 1929, I was on duty in the Ladies' gallery of the Assembly. At about 12.30, I heard an explosion and going towards the bench to look down into the Chamber I saw bluish smoke arising from the centre of the Chamber near the place where Sir George Schuster was seated. A little later, another explosion took place and on that occasion, I saw smoke arising from the Chamber immediately below the Ladies' Gallery. Soon after the second explosion I heard two pistol shots ring out in quick succession.

"Following the indications of those people (among the crowd) I ran to the pillar.... I saw two men standing by themselves about midway between the Ladies' Gallery and the central door. There was no one between them and me. When I first saw

them they were in an excited condition and both were shouting "Down With Imperialism" in thunderous voices. They were facing towards me. The man, whom I afterwards learnt to be Bhagat Singh, was nearer to me. In his right hand he was holding a pistol pointing downwards. (Sukh Dev writes here, that "At that moment Bhagat Singh had no pistol in his hand. The pistol was picked up from the seat of one of the official members of the Assembly. It is (was) only to prove that the pistol is the same as used in Saunders' murder.

"The other man whose name I subsequently learnt as B.K. Dutt, was standing by his side.

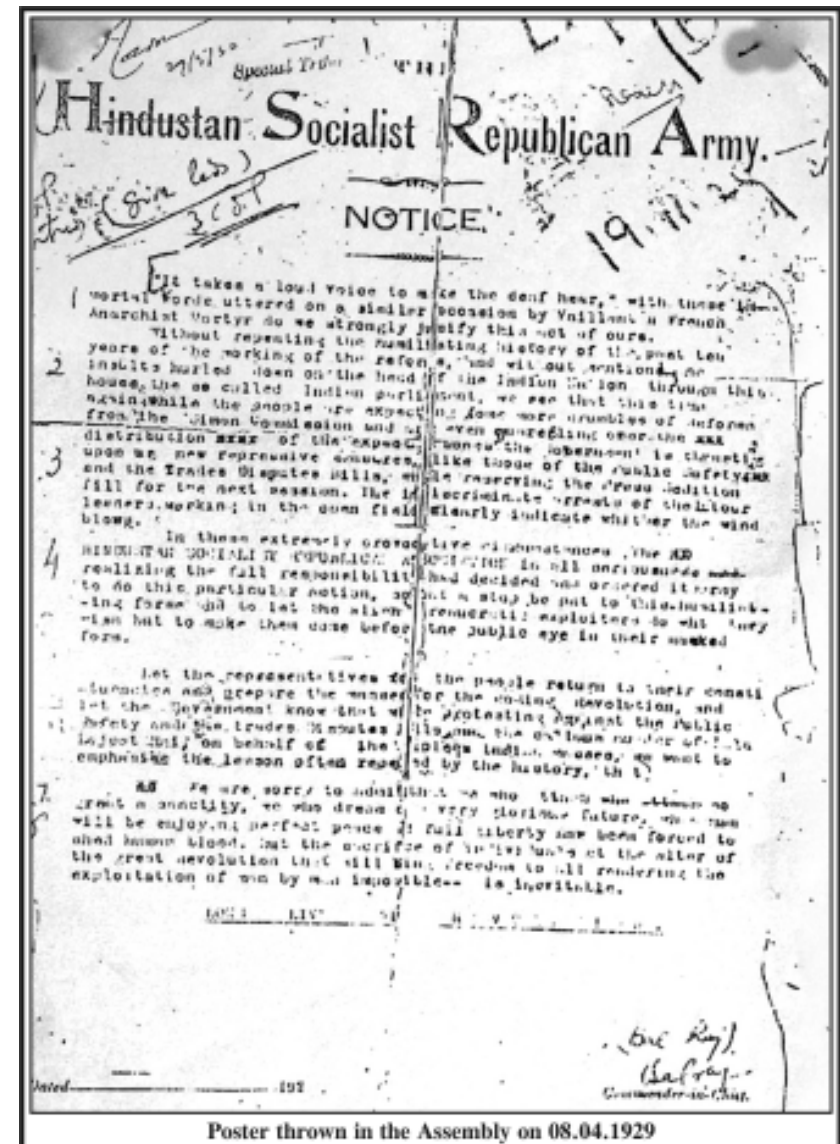
"From the person of Bhagat Singh was recovered a loaded pistol magazine. Some newspapers and pamphlets were also recovered from the two men. The pamphlets were of a thick paper with heading in red print "Hindustan Socialist Republican Army". Below the heading was printed the words "Commander-in-Chief" and there was the signature of Balraj in the manuscript. Between the heading and the printed words there was some blue typed matter of revolutionary character".¹⁶

Poster thrown in the Assembly on 8-4-1929

"It takes a loud voice to make the deaf hear", with these immortal words uttered on a similar occasion by Valliant, a French anarchist martyr, do we strongly justify this action of ours.

"Without repeating the humiliating history of the past ten years of the working of the Reforms (Montague-Chelmsford Reforms) and without mentioning the insults hurled at the Indian nation through this House-the so-called Indian Parliament- we want to point out that, while some people are expecting some more crumbs of reforms from the Simon Commission, and are ever quarrelling over the distribution of the expected bones, the Government is thrusting upon us new repressive measures like the Public Safety and the Trade Disputes Bill, while reserving the Press Sedition Bill for the next session. The indiscriminate arrests of labour leaders working in the open field clearly indicate whither the wind blows.

"In these extremely provocative circumstances, the HINDUSTAN SOCIALIST REPUBLICAN ASSOCIATION, in all seriousness, realizing their full responsibility, had decided



Poster thrown in the Assembly on 08.04.1929

and ordered its army to do this particular action, so that a stop be put to this humiliating farce and to let the alien bureaucratic exploiters do what they wish, but they must be made to come before the public eye in their naked form.

"Let the representatives of the people return to their constituencies and prepare the masses for the coming revolution,

and let the Government know that while protesting against the Public Safety and Trade Disputes Bills and the callous murder of Lala Lajpat Rai, on behalf of the helpless Indian masses, **WE WANT TO EMPHASIZE THE LESSON OFTEN REPEATED BY HISTORY**, that it is easy to kill Individuals but you cannot kill the Ideas. Great empires crumbled while the ideas survived, Bourbons and Czars fell.

“We are sorry to admit that we who attach so great a sanctity to human life, we who dream of a glorious future, when man will be enjoying perfect peace and full liberty, have been forced to shed human blood. But the sacrifice to Individuals at the altar of the ‘Great Revolution’ that will bring freedom to all, rendering the exploitation of man by man impossible, is inevitable.

“LONG LIVE THE REVOLUTION.”

Sd/-

Balraj

Commander-in-Chief

“The Assembly session was adjourned. The news spread like wild fire throughout the country. The newspapers headlined the news ‘Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt threw bombs in the Assembly’. Raised slogans of Inqilab Zindabad. Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt courted arrest.”¹⁶

The Void

Shiv Verma recalls the evening of 8 April 1929 whence he was with Jai Dev in their newly occupied room in Delhi:



Shiv Verma

“Only Jai Dev and I were in Delhi. We had already hired a separate room. After the days’ work, we went on the roofs to our beds. Our hearts were heavy with grief. It seemed as if we had returned after sacrificing our two dear ones a short while ago. As soon as I shut my eyes the picture of prison began to conjure up before me: I had never seen a prison till then and had only heard the frightening tales of it.... Only the previous night, all of us slept together. Now two of us had departed for ever. I felt like crying as it seemed that we would never

meet them in life. Crying was a weakness. Therefore, I got up quietly and sat near the window which opened towards a desolate road to control myself and to suppress my emotions. Jai Dev was also lying like me with the eyes shut. After sometime when Jai Dev opened the eyes, he saw that I was not in my bed. It was not difficult for him to find me out. Seeing me sitting by the window, silently he came to me and sitting near me said, ‘Shiv’.

“Nature has endowed the human body with two detectives who reveal all the secrets of the heart in spite of all the efforts to hide them; though I tried hard but tears fell down from my eyes. At the same time, two other informers felt restless to tell the tale; Jai Dev’s eyes also became moist.... When the dear ones get separated, perhaps it does happen!

“That night we sat silently by the window for a long time and the spies related their stories intermittently. Our two comrades had fulfilled the task with full responsibility which the party had assigned to them.”¹⁸

About the feelings and sentiments of the party comrades in the wake of arrest of Bhagat Singh and Dutt on 8 April 1929, **Bhagwan Das Mahore** had depicted the scene at Jhansi centre of the party, which was party’s headquarter:

“After 2-3 days of Bhagat Singh and Dutt’s arrest, Shiv Verma came here along with photographs of both these comrades; on seeing the photographs everyone became emotional and tearful. Shiv Verma spoke in a highly emotional way the risk they had undertaken to extract these photographs at the risk of their own lives. We were all wiping our tears. What we all noticed was that Azad remained totally unmoved like a philosopher and was sitting



Mata Jagrani Devi
Azad's mother



Chander Shekhar Azad

totally detached. He kept on staring at us all for quite some time. Later, when I found him sitting alone in a thoughtful mood with tears in his eyes, I went to him and began to console him with words of sympathy. Azad said, 'My anguish is not because Bhagat Singh and Dutt had parted; that is bound to happen to all of us, sooner or later upon arrest or being shot; but what I perceive is that how loving affectionate hearts you all possess, whereas only I am heartless, stone-like, having become just a machine of revolution. You are truly humane.

Can my heart, being as it is be called a heart?'¹⁹

The day, Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt threw two harmless bombs in the Central Assembly on 8th April 1929 that too on the empty space so as to avoid injury to anyone, shouting *Inqulab Zindabad*, was a landmark not only in the history of revolutionary movement but also in the annals of history of our freedom struggle. So much so, that the press which had been, so far, ignoring them, started giving them front page coverage. The distinctive features of this *action* which was an 'action' only in name in which no one was intended to be hurt, the culprits instead of running a way after the incident were to offer themselves for arrest and were ultimately to make a confession in the court much like a *Satyagrahi*.

The impact: Yashpal had also related a relevant anecdote: "Those days, Lala Durga Das was correspondent of *The Statesman* at Delhi. He wanted to send this news to his Calcutta headquarters instantly but all the telephone lines had been got exclusively reserved for official use. He displayed the rare ingenuity of a journalist by sending this report to the paper's London office from where it was sent by wireless

to its Calcutta headquarters for publication on the next day. Consequently by the time the rest of the papers of Calcutta got the news report from their news agency the 'Associated Press of India', the special edition of *The Statesman* carrying the news of explosion in the Assembly was already available to readers."²⁰

The H.S.R.A. made full use of the Press from that day onwards as they had started making headlines. According to **Jatindra Sanyal**, advance copies of the statement which Bhagat Singh and Dutt later made



Jatinder Nath Sanyal

before the Court had been smuggled out in advance from the jail and it was ensured that they reached the newspapers before the statement's submission before the Court. The idea was to pre-empt any possibility of the vital portions of the statement being expunged and thereby not being taken on record. This is precisely what was done by the Court. They, thus, ensured an unexpunged version of the statement receiving full publicity. Not only in India, copies of the statement had also been sent to foreign press; '*La Humanite*' of Ireland and '*Pravada*' of Russia, being among those. Thus it got international coverage. In these endeavours, the brain of B.K. Sinha seemed to be working. He was not only a fearless revolutionary but also an accomplished journalist.²¹

So far, as Bhagat Singh and Dutt were concerned, trial was just a part of revolutionary struggle 'by other means' which consisted primarily of propagation of their ideology and programme among the widest possible sections of Indian society. Since they never denied throwing of the bombs in the Chamber, the only issue left was regarding their motive in doing so. Their measure of success in this regard can be gauged in the following remarks of the High Court Judge about Bhagat Singh. "*Bhagat Singh is a sincere revolutionary, I have no doubt, that is to say, he is sincere in the illusion that the world can be improved by destroying the social structure as it now stands by substituting for the rule of law, the unrestrained will of the individual.*"²²

With the wide sweep of their message, they had been catapulted to the centre-stage of India's political scenario. Media, the flag bearer of public opinion became their mouthpiece. Various newspapers vied with each other to be the first to publish the news and present the most authentic version of what they did and said as indicated by the *modus operandi* adopted by Shri Durga Das. The impact on the public opinion was not confined only to India; public opinion in England too was shaken out of their complacency that all was well in India and that the people were happy with the British rule.

So far, the revolutionaries of India had been the 'soft targets' or the 'whipping boys' for critics of all hues. They were made the scapegoats for anything that went wrong in the national polity. It was vehemently and consistently argued that the terrorists were proving to be the major hurdle in India's smooth progress towards 'freedom' since they, by their actions, 'compelled' the Government to 'go slow' in the matter of progress towards 'self-rule'. They were projected as the villains, who, out of perverse motives and logic, indulged in violence

at the drop of a hat. Their favourite line of attack was to juxtapose revolutionaries 'violence' to what Bhagat Singh called 'Utopian non-violence'. But now these youngmen turned the tables on their critics as even the highest representative of the Empire, Lord Irwin had ruled out any intention on their part to harm any individual *per se* by their 'action'.

Climax: the Court statement

Their statement before the Trial Court elaborating on their stand as hinted in the leaflet thrown in the Chamber on 8 April 1929 can be safely called a classic, both for its substance as well as for style.

In their statement they expounded their 'motive', the excerpts from which are reproduced below:

"We stand charged with certain serious offences and at this stage, it is but right that we must explain our conduct.

In this connection the following questions arise:

1. Were the bombs thrown in to the Chamber and if so why?
2. Is the charge, as framed by the Lower Court correct or otherwise?

"To the first half of the first question, our reply is in the affirmative...

"In our reply to the next half of the first question, we are constrained to go into some detail to offer a full and frank explanation of our motive and the circumstances leading to what has now become a historic event.

"When we are told by some of the police officers, who visited us in the jail that Lord Irwin in his address to the joint session of the two Houses described the event as an attack on no individual but against an institution, we readily recognized that the true significance of the incident had been correctly appreciated.

"We are next to none in our love for humanity. Far from having any malice against any individual, we hold human life sacred beyond words....

"Our practical protest was against the institution, which, since its birth, has eminently helped to display not only its worthlessness but its far reaching power for mischief.

"Solemn resolutions passed by the House have been

contemptuously trampled underfoot on the floor of so called Indian Parliament.

"Finally the insult of what we consider an inhuman and barbarous measure, was hurled on the devoted heads of the representatives of the entire country, and the starving and struggling millions were deprived of their primary right and sole means of improving their economic welfare. None who has felt like us for the dumb-driven drudges of labourers, could possibly witness this spectacle with equanimity. None whose heart bleeds for them, who have given their life-blood in silence to the building up of the economic structure, could repress the cry, which this ruthless blow had wrung out of our hearts.

"Our sole purpose was 'to make the deaf hear', and to give the heedless a timely warning. Others have as keenly felt as we have done, and from under the seeming stillness of the sea of Indian humanity, a veritable storm is about to break out. We have only hoisted the 'danger signal' to warn those who are speeding along without heeding the grave dangers ahead.

"The elimination of force at all costs is 'Utopian' and the new movement, which has arisen in the country, and of that dawn we have given a warning, is inspired by the ideals which guided Guru Gobind Singh and Shiva ji, Kamal Pasha and Raza Khan, Washington and Garibaldi, Lifayate and Lenin.

"It is not the cult of the bomb and the pistol. By 'Revolution' we mean that the present orders of things, which is based on manifest injustice, must change. A radical change, therefore, is necessary and it is the duty of those who realise it, to reorganise society on the socialistic basis. Unless this thing is done and the exploitation of man by man, and nations by nations is brought to an end, sufferings and carnage with which the humanity is threatened today cannot be prevented. All talk of ending war and ushering in an era of universal peace is undisguised hypocrisy.

"By 'Revolution' we mean the ultimate establishment of an order of society which may not be threatened by such breakdown and in which the sovereignty of the proletariat should be recognized and a world federation should redeem humanity from the bondage of Capitalism and misery of imperial wars.

"Revolution is an unalienable right of all. Labour is the

real sustainer of society. The sovereignty of the people is the ultimate destiny of the workers.

“For these ideals and for this faith we shall welcome any suffering to which we may be condemned. At the altar of the revolution we have brought our youth as an incense, for no sacrifice is too great for so magnificent a cause. We are content to await the advent of revolution.

“Long live revolution.”²³

With each passing day after 8 April 1929, the affection and regard for Bhagat Singh and Dutt in particular, and for their comrades in general, went on escalating. By the time the trio of Raj Guru, Sukh Dev and Bhagat Singh went to the gallows on 23 March 1931, they had become legends. Their sacrifices were seen as phenomenal by millions of Indians. Dr. Gurdev Singh Sidhu, in his fresh compilation “The Hanging of Bhagat Singh — The Banned Literature” had identified at least 153 publications on Bhagat Singh and his comrades, which were proscribed by Governments of then Ajmer and Marwar, Bangal, Bihar, Orrisa, Bombay, Burma (then in India), Central Provinces (M. P.), Delhi, Madras and U.P.²⁴

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— Jagan Nath)

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12

THE HUNGER STRIKES**Arrests**

Bhagat Singh and Dutt were kept in police custody at the Civil Lines police station till 22 April 1929 when they were sent to Delhi jail. They refused to make any statement before the police. Sometime in the third week of April 1929, Sardar Kishan Singh (Bhagat Singh's father) came to Delhi to see his son but had to return disappointed since he was not allowed to see him.

Bhagat Singh in his letter to his father from Delhi jail on 26 April had written that "the trial will start on 7 May. Perhaps the whole drama will end in one month. You need not worry. I have learnt that you came here and talked to some lawyers. You also tried to meet me. A meeting can be arranged on any day whenever you come here. There is no need to engage a lawyer. However, I want to take legal opinion on some matters but they are not so important. You should not take unnecessary trouble.

"If you come to see me, please come alone. Don't bring mother along. She will cry, which would also disturb me: I'll get all the news from you. Please bring the biography of Napoleon, which you may find in my books and also some good English novels, which you may be able to get from Dwarka Das Library. My obeisance to Mata ji and *Chachi* jis. *Namaste* to Kulbir and Kultar. Obeisance to Dada ji. We were treated well while we were in police custody and now also in jail".

On 3rd May, Sardar Kishan Singh met Bhagat Singh along with Barrister Asif Ali. As per the family sources, Kishan Singh was bent upon contesting the case in the Court but Bhagat Singh was adamant in not doing so; for him it was the forum to propagate his ideology. He, however, sought clarification from Mr. Asif Ali on some legal issues¹

The initial trial started in the Court of Mr. F.B. Pool, the Additional Magistrate. But Bhagat Singh and Dutt declined to make any statement there and expressed their desire to make their statement only in the

Session Court. The case was committed for trial before the Delhi Session Judge Mr. Leonard Middletown and the trial started on 4th June. The accused made their statement on 6th June. The trial concluded on 10th June and the judgement was pronounced on 12th June sentencing them both to transportation for life.

During their trial the only one Prosecution Witness (PW 70) Sir Sobha Singh (father of eminent writer Khushwant Singh) claimed that he had actually SEEN Bhagat Singh and Dutt hurling the bombs. However, during his cross-examination it came out that his claim was not sustainable. The Judge too had felt so, though he refrained from saying so since "That witness is a man of very respectable position, an honorary magistrate."²

Soon after they were transferred to Mianwali and Lahore Jails in Punjab respectively, where they had to go on a prolonged hunger strike, seeking privileges of political prisoners. Their appeal before the High Court was dismissed on 13 January 1930.

As mentioned earlier, **the Agra centre was wound up by 1 April 1929 and the new centre was established at Saharanpur (U.P.).**

Lahore raid: "On 13th April, Jai Gopal returned to Lahore from Kohat and met Sukh Dev on 14th April. He visited the quarter in Kashmir Building where Sukh Dev and Kishori Lal were engaged in bomb making and on the morning of 15 April 1929. Sukh Dev, Kishori Lal and Jai Gopal were present there when a raid was made by certain police officers, an Honorary Magistrate and other persons on those quarters and the there trio were arrested. Sukh Dev had in his possession a revolver which was loaded. Among the other articles recovered at the search of these quarters were a live bomb, 8 bombshells, a large number of chemicals in a cupboard of which the key was found on the person of Kishori Lal.

About the recovery of live bombs, P.W. 23, D.S.P. Niaz Ahmad Khan testified that while they began to search the rooms, Sukh Dev said: "In that box, there is a live bomb. It should be handled carefully lest it explodes". He pointed to the box on the shelf of an almirah. The box was taken down carefully and a loaded bomb found in a shell made of iron.

...numerous other books and documents including a letter p. 137 which had been written in the hand of Bhagat Singh before he threw the bomb in Assembly Hall were recovered. The police raid on the Kashmir Building had taken place in consequence of information given

to Nur Shah constable (P.W. 132) by Ghulam Rasool, a moulder (P.W. 129) who was one of the persons from whom Sukh Dev and Kishori Lal were obtaining bombshells, who had mentioned about it to his father Jalal Din (P.W. 130). The latter advised him to inform Nur Shah Constable who instructed them to trace out the place of the suspects, which led to detection of Kashmir Building centre.

Raid at Saharanpur: “The house of Saharanpur had hitherto escaped search, but suspicion was aroused concerning the occupants of the house by their behaviour and on the 11th May, Mr. M.D. Joshi D.S.P. (P.W. 230) and other police officers decided to raid this house. They arrested Shiv Verma and Jai Dev from that house and took into possession 6 live bombs, 3 empty bombshells, 3 revolvers, several revolutionary books and a large quantity of chemicals and apparatus. A guard was left at the house, and two days later, on 15th May, Gaya Parshad, who was earlier absent, returned to the house and was also arrested.”³

Hunger Strikes

Jail life rarely stands in the way of a revolutionary in his crusade for justice and liberty. Only it requires a different approach, since he is constrained by oppressive set of rules in jail. The time-tested tool of hunger strike came to their rescue. The accounts of the heroic struggle of revolutionaries transported to Andamans, largely ignored by our academic historians, who were too V.I.P. obsessed to bother about these lay crusaders.

As if by a coincidence, some of the *Ghadrites* of 1915 fame, who had been through prolonged hunger strikes, torture and humiliation in Andamans were also then confined in the Central Jail of Lahore at the fag-end of their sentences of transportation for life; whilst in Andamans they had succeeded in debarring the Cellular Jail for political prisoners in 1922.

Bhagat Singh and his comrades, realizing this beforehand, were fully determined to give a fight, but as the events unfolded, it shall be seen that they were, in fact, also inexorably driven to this ordeal by the actual situation and not just by choice or design.

Regarding Bhagat Singh and Dutt, they had been moved from Delhi Jail the same day i.e. 12 June 1929 when they were sentenced to transportation for life. “Soon after they had intimated the press about their resolve to undertake hunger strike against their imminent

‘maltreatment’ in the jails, whereupon various newspapers came out with an unequivocal support to their resolve.”⁴

“Soon after his arrival in Mianwali Jail on 17 June 1929, Bhagat Singh sent a representation to I.G. Jails, Punjab seeking transfer to Lahore Central Jail, on the grounds that in view of his trial in Lahore Conspiracy case starting shortly at Lahore, he must be shifted there to enable him to engage a lawyer and avail of other facilities essential for his defence in the case.”⁵

About his other demands also, he had written to I.G. Jails from Mianwali Jail through the jail Superintendent on the same day:

“I have been sentenced to transportation for life in connection with Assembly Bomb Case Delhi and am obviously, a political prisoner. We were given a special diet in Delhi jail, but since my arrival here, I am being treated as an ordinary criminal convict. Therefore I have been on hunger strike since the morning of the 15 June 1929. In these two or three days my weight had decreased by 6 lbs (2½ kg.). compared to what it was in Delhi jail.

“I wish to bring to your kind attention that I should get special treatment as a political prisoner.

My demands are:

1. Special diet including milk, ghee, rice, curd etc.
2. No compulsory labour
3. Toilet requisites, soap, oil, shaving kit etc.
4. Literature of all kinds (history, economics, political science, poetry, drama, fiction, newspapers etc.

I hope you will very kindly consider what I have said and decide favourably.”

The object behind the individual representation was that if the demands of one political prisoner were conceded, it would help the rest, making it a precedent. It was a shrewd and strategic move.

“After a few days (around 25 June 1929), Bhagat Singh was shifted to Lahore Central Jail where B.K. Dutt too was kept, who had also been on hunger strike and had also sent an identical representation to jail authorities.

“In the meanwhile, Bhagat Singh’s comrades — other undertrials in the Lahore Conspiracy Case — namely Sukh Dev, J.N. Das, Ajoy Ghosh, Shiv Verma, Gaya Parshad, Jai Dev, Raj Guru and B.K. Sinha too were brought to be lodged in Lahore Borstal Jail. On coming to know about the

hunger strike of Bhagat Singh and Dutt, they also followed suit in July 1929.⁶

Recalls Shiv Verma, “When on 10th July, the hearing of our case started, Bhagat Singh was already on a hunger strike. He had been sentenced to life in Assembly Bomb Case, and now he was to be tried again for treason along with us. He had stopped eating since 15th June but still he came to the Court. When he was brought in the Court on a stretcher, all of us were moved to tears. He was not the same Bhagat Singh, whose sturdy physique had vanished. Instead, the ‘Bhagat Singh’ we saw now was merely a shadow of his former self, pale and weak. The ordeal of prison and hunger strike had reduced him to a skeleton.

“We discussed our strategy for defence for about three days: Despite his frail health, he took active part in the discussions and played a stellar role.... After three days, on 13 July 1929, the rest of us too began hunger strike for the demands raised by Bhagat Singh and Dutt. Accordingly, Bhagat Singh addressed a letter to Home Member on 14 July 1929 putting forward our demands.⁷

“However, before we started our hunger strike, **Jatin**, who was the only comrade among us with previous experience of hunger strikes, warned us all: ‘By venturing on this strike, we are plunging into a prolonged ordeal, which is far more challenging than the fight with pistols and revolvers.... It is far easier to die of a police bullet or by going to the gallows than perishing away ‘iota by iota’ inching towards the demise; and once having entered into the arena, to retreat there from would be prejudicial to the esteem of the revolutionaries.... In such a scenario, it would be desirable not to undertake it at all.

“He also said that ‘as far as he was concerned, he, once having started it, shall not compromise till the Government accepts our demands charter. He advised us all that we should, have its first hand experience by abstaining from food for 24 hours to assess themselves, and if anyone finds himself lacking in his capacity to carry it to its logical end, he should, at no cost, join it. He also gave a solemn assurance that those comrades, who opt out of the hunger strike, would continue to be worthy of his equal regard as he has for the rest.”⁸

“In pursuance of the decision of the Central Committee mentioned above, Bhagat Singh in a letter to the Home Member submitted the following demands:

1. Being political prisoners, decent diet be provided to us

identical to the food provided to European prisoners.

2. Political prisoners should not be humiliated in the name of making them do manual labour.
3. Reading and writing material be supplied without constraints.
4. At least one newspaper be supplied to each prisoner at State expense.
5. A separate class be notified for political prisoners. A special, separate ward be provided in each jail, where they should be able to enjoy all the facilities which were provided to European prisoners and all the political prisoners in the jail be accommodated therein.
6. Facilities for bathing, and proper clothing be given.
7. Recommendations of the U.P. Jail Reforms Committee, comprising Shri Jagat Narain and Khan Bahadur Hafiz Hidayat Hussain to the effect that political prisoners be treated like higher class prisoners, should be followed here too.

“This hunger strike lasted 63 days. Bhagat Singh continued with his reading, writing, washing, attending the Court, drafting documents, making statements, joking and laughing, humming and singing songs, as usual. During the trial, Bhagat Singh and Dutt had been kept in Central Jail while rest of us were confined in Borstal jail. Bhagat Singh and despite being on hunger strike used to come to Borstal jail every Sunday.

“We had some books in the jail since day one and the atmosphere was quite congenial for study and exchange of ideas. We used to discuss ideological and social issues otherwise too but Bhagat Singh’s presence would make this much more lively. Seldom a day would pass without having thrashed some or the other issue threadbare. The books which had been read during the week, were on diverse topics like Marxism, progress in Soviet Russia, upsurge in Afghanistan, Sino-Japanese strife, League of Nations’ fiasco, the Meerut Conspiracy Case, Labour struggle, role of Indian Capitalist Class, policy of the Congress and possibility of a change in its political goal in Lahore Congress session. Though we all had a passion for reading, yet Bhagat Singh was a class by himself. Despite his having a soft corner for socialism, he always clung to his passion for reading novels too, particularly with political and economic themes. Dickens, Upton Sinclair, Hall Cane, Victor Hugo, Gorky, Stepnik, Oscar Wilde, Leonard Andrew were among his favourites. He

frequently got emotionally involved with some particular characters in the novels, to the extent that he wept and laughed with them. A familiar instance was a character in Leonard Andrew's novel "The Seven Who were Hanged". This character kept on saying "I shall not be hanged...." While he was being actually led to the gallows, he was still saying "I shall not be hanged". Upon reading this, Bhagat Singh would first laugh heartily ...and then be silent and tears would start rolling down his eyes."⁹

An aside:

Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna

One of their *Ghadrite* co-prisoners in Lahore Central Jail, (**Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna**, the founder President of Ghadr Party had related his version of these days:



(L-R): Baba Santa Singh Gandhiwind, Baba Darshan Singh Pheruman, Com. Fauja Singh Bhullar, **Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna** and Baba Karam Singh Cheema under arrest at Amritsar Railway Station in connection with a farmers' agitation against an arbitrary tax of the Irrigation Department in 1938, popularly, known as 'Mogha Morcha'.

"Somehow myself and Bhagat Singh met often and held discussions. Once, in a lighter vein, I asked Bhagat Singh,

"You are so young, educated and from a rich family, and your age is of fun and frolic; then how come you got entangled in all this?"

To which Bhagat Singh replied with a mischievous smile, "In fact the blame for this lies on you and your comrades."

"How?" said I.

He replied, "Had the ones like Kartar Singh and his associates not braved the gallows with a smile and others like you had not been through the veritable hell, Cellular jail, may be I would not have been here."

...Whenever I met him, I always saw in him the same traits as Sarabha had in him: Just another Sarabha!

"Bhagat Singh and his comrades went on hunger strike demanding special class for political prisoners and an even treatment for the poor and the rich. I kept watching this for a few days but when it got prolonged, I could not help giving notice of my hunger strike also to jail authorities. When Bhagat Singh learnt about it he sent me a number of messages saying

"Baba ji, you had already gone through great ordeals in Andamans and elsewhere. So now you should desist from hunger strike."

"With all the affection for him, I replied: 'When youngmen like you have put your lives at stake for the sake of others, how can an old man like me who is in the evening of his life, remain a mute spectator?'

"So I too went on a hunger strike and continued it as long as they did."¹⁰

Ajoy Ghosh had also narrated this episode in his memoirs: "One



Ajay Kumar Ghosh

particular incident of this hunger strike had a deep impact on all of us. It was, that one of the veterans of 1915 *Ghadr* movement Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna, then a prisoner in Lahore Central Jail too joined us in our hunger strike. He had already undergone his 14 years of life imprisonment and was due for release. We were told by the jail superintendent that if he persists in his hunger strike, he shall not get the remission being allowed to him in his term of imprisonment. Apart from this, we were told, his health was not good; fourteen years of rigorous

imprisonment had ruined his physique, and this strike could endanger even his life.

"Accordingly, Bhagat Singh met Baba ji and argued with him to give up the hunger strike but all in vain. Tears dripped down the eyes of Bhagat Singh when, on return, he recounted his conversation with Baba

ji. As long as our hunger strike continued, Baba ji too remained on strike. Consequently, the remission which had fallen due to him was withdrawn because of which he had to remain in jail for an extra year.”¹¹

Personal Note: This writer, who had prolonged and intimate contacts both with Baba ji as well as Bhagat Singh’s family, particularly with his mother and hence knew the high esteem in which each of them held the other. Once in 1968, both came to my house at Ludhiana, one by one, after attending a function at the Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana. Baba ji reached first. The moment *Bebe ji* entered, Baba ji stood up to touch her feet while she, on her part, tried to touch his feet.... a ‘touching’ scene indeed.

Public support: The hunger strike aroused wide public sympathy. News appeared daily in the press. Numerous public meetings were held to condemn the attitude of the Government. Under the joint auspices of the City Congress and the *Naujwan Bharat Sabha*, a public meeting was held on 30 June 1929 in the Jallianwala Bagh at 8 P.M. under the chairmanship of Dr. Kitchlew to observe ‘Bhagat Singh Day’. It was the same hallowed spot which had catalysed the spirit of sacrifice in Bhagat Singh on 14 April 1919. The proceedings of that meeting opened with the slogans so dear to Bhagat Singh, i.e., “Long Live Revolution” “Down with Imperialism”. Bhagat Singh and his comrades were eulogized. Tributes were paid to them by Deoki Nandan Charan and Master Mota Singh: Both lauded Bhagat Singh as the real devotee of the Motherland. At the conclusion of the meeting, the following resolution was passed:

“This meeting of the citizens of Amritsar appreciates the hunger strike observed by Bhagat Singh and Dutt for the last 14 days as protest against the poor treatment accorded to the political prisoners in the jails and while expressing sympathy with them, it warns the bureaucracy that if any harm is done to their lives, it would be held responsible for it.”

“The resolution was carried, of course, readily. Similar ‘Bhagat Singh Day’ celebrations were held by the Lahore Branch of the *Naujwan Bharat Sabha* on 21 July 1929 which was attended by about 10,000 people. According to a Government report, it was the largest gathering that had attended any political meeting for some considerable time.

“In spite of strong public protests, the Government persisted with

its callous attitude towards those on hunger strike and resorted to forced feeding which Bhagat Singh and his associates resisted as best as they could.¹²

“On 17 July 1929, after the Court adjourned, the Special Magistrate addressed a letter to the jail authorities to take disciplinary action against the accused for refusing to accept the Government offer of concessions and (for) stalling the Court’s proceedings.

“On 18th July, applications for meeting from Kiron Das (brother of J.N. Das), the brother of Kishori Lal, father of Mahavir Singh and mother and sister of Surendra Pandey were rejected by the Special Magistrate.

“On 19th July, the police, by order of the District Magistrate, *lathi* charged the ‘protest procession’ also which was collecting funds for the defence.”¹³

Writes Shiv Verma: “As per our decision, our hunger strike started on 13th July. We decided that during our strike we shall not accept any medicine nor shall we permit the jail authorities to feed us by force.

“For 10-12 days, the authorities did not bother. They thought that ‘these lads’ in their early twenties shall not be able to persevere for long without eating. The jail authorities would, for the sake of browbeating us, leave most delicious food, milk, fruit etc. in our cells to tempt us. But as soon as they left, we would either throw it out of our cell or spoil it so as to render it unfit for consumption.”¹⁴

Ajoy Ghosh had penned a touching episode in this context: “The jail authorities adopted another ruse to demoralise us. They started leaving milk instead of water in our pitchers. This was really a cruel joke on us. After a day, the thirst became intolerable. We would approach the pitcher thirsting for water, but finding milk instead, used to come back frustrated. We felt that we may even lose our mental balance and go mad.... Had the person who ordered this come before me, I might have strangled him to death.... The guard sitting outside was watching all this. By now, the thirst had become unbearable. My throat had gone dry. I called the sentry and asked for water. He said, “No orders for giving water.” I lost my cool and lifting the milk pitcher threw it on the floor, breaking it into pieces. The milk got spilt and scattered, falling also on the uniform of the sentry. He felt that I had gone mad. His face became pale. Truly, I was no more in my senses!

“Precisely the same happened to Kishori and other comrades who

too had broken the pitchers in the same way.

“Ultimately, the Jailer acceded to our request and water was provided in our cells. I took water, and in plenty. This resulted in my falling sick and every drop of water came out in vomits.”¹⁵

Resumes Shiv Verma, “Ultimately, on eleventh day onwards the jail authorities started ‘force feeding’ us. By now, the Government had constituted a board of doctors to direct the ‘operation’. If the prisoner did not resist, it would be a smooth affair; with a rubber pipe inserted down to the stomach, liquid food was poured in a measured quantity, and that would be the end of it. But since we had resolved not to permit any food to go inside our stomach, the forced feeding was a horrible ordeal for us.

“In the face of our resistance, for each one of us, a team of two doctors, one jail official and ten stout, sturdy prison wardens were deputed. Those musclemen would first pin each one of us down to the floor and hold us there till the doctor finished with ‘force feeding’, who, after inserting the rubber pipe through the nose or mouth of the victim, would pour a measure of liquid diet.

“We, on our part, had devised our individual modes of resistance: Some of us knowing the technique of coughing when the rubber pipe was just to go down the nose or throat in such a way that it would then be held between the jaws and teeth and would thereafter keep lying on the floor with the pipe held tight in the teeth. Such kind of prisoners were particularly difficult for the doctors to handle. The doctors, so resisted, would get highly annoyed.

“Those with broad nostrils, were fed through thicker pipes, which could hardly be opposed by holding it in the mouth in the manner stated above. Doctors, in their case, would insert the pipe through and through with a single jerk. These comrades had then to rely on brute force to resist pipe’s insertion and therefore they became favourite targets of the fury of jail officials since taming them posed a challenge to them.



“One of these, **Mahavir Singh**, was a wrestler. Seeing the jail officials approaching him with their musclemen, he would first block their way. When they subdued him, he would be overpowered and force-fed.

Once a jail official was heard whispering to one of his colleagues, “Not even a single day during his hunger strike of 63 days, it took us anything less than half an hour to force-feed Mahavir”.¹⁶

“Once in reply to a question by **Das to Bhagat Singh**, as to how he faced ‘force feeding’, Bhagat Singh replied, “I put up resistance as much as I can, but they manage to feed me forcibly; as my nose is big, they can easily pass the tube and feed me.”¹⁷

The Government Moves: Appointment of Jail Inquiry Committee.

Alarmed by the determination and plight of strikers and the magnitude of countrywide protests, the Government yielded and appointed the Punjab Jails Inquiry Committee on 2 September 1929. Four members of the committee visited the jail, met the hunger strikers and allowed them a cot, a table and a chair, newspapers and light.

Consequently on 2 September 1929, Bhagat Singh and all his comrades, except Jatin Das abandoned the strike. By the time, Bhagat Singh and Dutt had completed 81 days and others 53 days of hunger strike.

“As then Comrade Jatin was on death bed, they could not feel victorious. Therefore two days later, i.e. on 4th September, they resumed the strike on the grounds that:

1. Jatin was not unconditionally released;
2. that the two convicts, Bhagat Singh and Dutt, who were undertrials in the Lahore Conspiracy Case, were not allowed to associate with their fellow non-convict prisoners.”¹⁸

The Tribune, 4 September 1929:

AT LAST

Lahore Sep 2.

Today, as a result of certain assurances given by members of the Jail Enquiry Committee, the under-trial prisoners in the Lahore Conspiracy Case agreed to discontinue the hunger-strike. They had been on strike for the number of days noted against their names:—

Names	Days.
Sardar Bhagat Singh	80
Mr. B.K. Dutt	80
Mr. Jatindranath Das	50
P. Kamal Nath Tewari	50

Mr. Ajoy Kumar Ghosh	50
Mr. Jitendranath Sanyal	50
Dr. Gaya Prasad	50
Mr. Jai Dev	50
Mr. Shiv Verma	50
Mr. Mahabir Singh	50
Mr. Agya Ram	50
Mr. Kishori Lal Ratan	50
Mr. Bijoy Kumar Sinha	22

FACILITIES TO SPECIAL CLASS PRISONERS

(From Our Own Correspondent)

Lahore Sep. 2

Several members of the Jail Enquiry Committee, including the Inspector General of Prisons, Sardar Bahadur Mehtab Singh, Chaudhari Afzal Haq, Lala Duni Chand of Ambala and R.B. Mohan Lal, saw today hunger-strikers in the Central Jail and the Borstal Institution and requested them to give up the hunger-strike pending the decision of the Committee. They promised to to their best to meet their demands. After prolonged discussion with the members of the Committee, which lasted for practically the whole day, they ended the hunger-strike in view of certain assurances given to them on behalf of the Committee regarding the redress of their grievances.

It is understood that during the preliminary discussions of members of the Punjab Jail Enquiry Committee the following unanimous decisions were arrived at:—

There will be no racial distinction between European and Indian ordinary prisoners. The same dietary stipend will be allowed to Europeans as to Indians.

The political prisoners will be divided into two classes — ordinary and special class prisoners. The special class prisoners will again be divided into three grades, namely, A, B and C.

The C grade will get twelve annas per day for their diet and those of B Grade one rupee per day; while prisoners of A grade, who will also be called “Star class prisoners”, will be given all possible comforts both in respect of diet and habitation. In case of need, they will

be given facilities of electric fans and lights and taken to hills, if necessary.

When an arrested man is produced before a Magistrate within 24 hours, whether for remand or trial, the Magistrate will have to specify the class to which the prisoner should belong, and since then he will enjoy the privileges attached to the class as recommended. It is understood that a questionnaire has been drawn up on the basis of these decisions. The Committee will commence recording evidence probably from the 23rd of September. Representative opinion of the Press has also been invited by the Committee. The Press will be allowed to report the proceedings of the Committee.¹⁹

“By now, the Punjab Jail Inquiry Committee had also submitted its recommendations. On October 4, Bhagat Singh and his colleagues suspended their hunger strike “till the final decision by the Government as regards the question of treatment of political prisoners in Indian jails”. This was “in obedience to the resolution of the All India Congress Committee and the wishes expressed in Sardar Sardul Singh’s message....

“But the Government again started adopting delaying tactics in the implementation of the recommendations of the Jail Inquiry Committee. Bhagat Singh, the high-spirited and courageous man as he was, was not prepared to take their dillydallying tactics lying down. Therefore, on 20 January 1930, he sent a telegram to the Home Member, Government of India, through Special Magistrate, warning the Government for its apathy and backing out from the assurances given to them, and called upon it to take a final decision within a week. On 28 January 1930, he telegraphed another petition to the Home Minister, Government of India, to the following effect:

“Suspended hunger strike on assurance given by the Jail Committee that the question of treatment of political prisoners was going to be finally settled to our satisfaction within a very short period. Copies of A.I.C.C. resolutions regarding hunger strike withheld by jail authorities. Authorities refused Congress deputation to meet the prisoners. The Conspiracy Case undertrials were assaulted brutally on the 23 and 24 October 1929 by the orders of the high police officials.

Sd/- Bhagat Singh, Dutt and others.²⁰

Mr. Jinnah's outburst in Central Assembly: September 12 and 14



“In the meanwhile, the issue of hunger strike came before the Central Assembly (meeting at Simla), when Home Member (Minister) moved an amendment to the Code of Criminal Procedure to dispense with the presence of accused.... “Whether that accused is represented by a pleader or not.” Speaking on the Bill, M.A. Jinnah said, “The man who goes on a hunger strike has a soul and he believes in the justice of his case.”²¹

“Sir, can you imagine a more horrible form of torture than a hunger strike? If, rightly or wrongly, these men are inflicting this punishment on themselves, and thereby you are unconvinced, is that any reason why you should ask us to abandon one of the cardinal principles of Criminal jurisprudence? If these youngmen pursue this course, and I am sorry to hear that one of them died, what will happen....”²²

“Well, you know perfectly well that these men are determined to die? It is not a joke. I ask the Hon’ble Law Member (Minister) to realise that it is not everybody who can go on starving himself to death. Try it for a little while and you will see. ...The man who goes on a hunger strike has a soul. He is moved by the soul and he believes in the justice of his cause, he is not an ordinary criminal who is guilty of cold-blooded sordid wretched crime.

...“Mind you Sir, I do not approve of the action of Bhagat Singh, and I say this on the floor of this House. I request that, rightly or wrongly, youth today in India is stirred up, and you cannot, when you have three hundred and odd millions of people, who cannot prevent such crimes being committed, however, much you may deplore them and however much you may say they are misguided. It is this system, this damnable system of Government which is resented by people. You may be cold-blooded logician. I am a patient cool-headed man and can calmly go on making speeches here, persuading and influencing the Treasury Bench. But remember there are thousands of young men outside. This is not the only country where these actions are resorted to. It has happened in other countries, not youth, but grey bearded

men had committed serious offences, moved by patriotic impulses.”²³

Resumes Shiv Verma:

On the third day that is 26th July 1929 he handled Das in the end after being relieved from other prisoners. He wanted to deal with him at leisure. When the first phase of wrestling and forcibly pinning down was over he inserted the tube through the nose, which Das swallowed up and pressed it between his teeth. The doctor began to insert another pipe through the other nostril. Das began feeling suffocated. Even then without opening his mouth he tried to stop the pipe from reaching his stomach. Instead of the stomach the second pipe went into his lungs. The doctor was in a hurry. He did not want to let go this opportunity. The eyes of Das had rolled backwards but the doctor did not look at his face and poured about a *seer* (about a kg) of milk into his lungs and in ecstasy of being successful left him writhing in pain and went away.

This incident took place in the hospital. By that time about half a dozen comrades besides Das had reached the hospital and all of them were confined in a single barrack. On seeing Das rolling in pain they went near him. The temperature of Das was going up rapidly. He coughed hard intermittently and he was experiencing difficulty in breathing. Observing him, the other comrades began to make a noise. After about half an hour the team of doctors turned up. They were at their wit’s end. They placed Das on a cot. When they began to put medicine into his mouth, Das who was in semiconscious condition, God knows from where did the energy come to him and he shut his mouth tight and said, “No”. When some associates insisted that he should take medicine, he even in that crucial pain also smiled. He knew that affection had overshadowed their resolve and turned down our request with a smile. Till the end he neither took an injection nor any medicine. In that condition there was no question of use of force. Therefore the doctors had to be content with another treatment (applying ointment to the chest and massage etc. only). Declaring Das as pneumonic they left. After this incident his coughing slowed down a little: Getting a little better he opened his eyes. Seeing all of us around he smiled once again. With a very weak voice he said to Jitendra Sanyal, “I shall not be caught by them now.”

“From that day he began to slide towards death little by little: With passing of every moment that carried him towards the martyrdom, the lines of firm resolve deepened on his face.

“His condition worsened in a few days. Poison spread in his body and eyes remained half shut. Doctors wanted to give anema but Das did not agree to that. The entreaties of Congress leaders and those of the members of Defence Committee did not work. Someone suggested to the government that he might oblige Bhagat Singh perhaps. For this Bhagat Singh was brought into the Central Jail. On his first request Das agreed. On this a superior officer for the jail asked Das if he had refused for this reason earlier, how did he give his consent at Bhagat Singh’s request. In reply he said, ‘Mister, you do not know how great Bhagat Singh is. I cannot refuse his bidding.’

“Similarly when on another occasion Bhagat Singh asked him to take medicine he said: ‘Look, Bhagat Singh, I know that I should not back out of my vow but I cannot refuse you either. Anyway don’t ask me any such thing in future.’

“Upon observing his worsening condition the government wanted to send him to Mayo hospital at first but on refusal of Das was it decided to set him free on bail. They also had arranged a proxy surety, a merchant; hearing plans of his sudden release he called us around him. ‘This all is a trap,’ he said ‘the government knows that I shall not live long. They do not want to take the responsibility of my death. They want to get rid of me by throwing me out of the jail gate. I shall not allow this.’ Saying this he looked towards us and said, ‘I want to be here amongst you fighting. I desire that you protest against your being shifted from this place.’

“All that time about one and half month of our hunger strike had passed and except one or two almost all the comrades had been shifted to hospital in view of their worsening condition. The speech of Das somehow instilled the comrades with strength. The door of the barrack was bolted from inside. Then everyone of us moved their iron beds, tables, almirahs etc to the door and prepared for active resistance. Das opened his eyes while lying on the bed and said, ‘Now it is all right.’

“After sometime the jail authorities appeared with their full force to remove Das. On seeing the fortification they thought that the situation was not conducive. None of us was in such a condition at that time that force could be used against anyone. Das sent a word to the Superintendent, standing outside that he would not accept the bail. The telephones rang and the farce did not go further. The fortification was removed when the English Superintendent swore in the name of Jesus the Christ that he would not try to remove Das against his will. After about one week Das



assembled all of us around him. Those who could not move, their beds were moved to him. His younger brother Kiron Das had been permitted to stay with him. He had brought a packet of biscuits with him. Das gave one biscuit to every one of us and said, ‘We are not breaking

our hunger strike. This is our last common feast, mere token of my love.’ Everyone ate the biscuit. Then he heard the song of Nazrul Islam, ‘*bolo vir, chir unnat mam sheer*’ (Say O, brave warrior, may my head stand erect). That night he talked till late with all of us around him. He enquired about those companions, who were not there and were locked in cells and heard ‘*Vande Mataram*’. It was the last flicker of the extinguishing lamp. Afterwards his condition deteriorated fast. He stopped talking; his hands and feet got swollen, eyes remained shut. In this condition too he replied every question with the movement of his head in yes or no. His mental faculties had not weakened.

On the 63rd day of his hunger strike when his condition worsened further the doctors wanted to give him an injection. They thought that an unconscious Das might not know that he had been given an injection. But as soon as they began to apply spirit holding his hand, he opened his eyes and with hoarse throat said, ‘No’ in a frightening voice and with it the team of doctors moved back in awe. After sometime he shut his eyes forever.

“On that day the officers had shifted those comrades also to the hospital who were locked up in cells. Standing around him every one paid his last tributes to Das. The doctors stood in a row and bowed their heads and the English Superintendent of jail removed his cap in respect and gave a military salute.

“The news that the condition of Das had worsened spread like wild fire in Lahore and now the whole city flocked to see him for the last time. The respect that his body received in Lahore and while carrying him from Lahore to Calcutta on every station on the way is incomparable in the history of the country. Except C.R. Das, Bhagat Singh, Gandhi, Rabindra Nath Tagore and Pandit Nehru hardly any other person has received so much respect from the people at his demise.

“His last journey from Lahore to Calcutta, witnessed the scenes of tumultuous crowds of people gathering to pay their last respects to the martyr at all the railway stations on the way. As regards the scale of participation of people in the funeral procession at Calcutta, Viceroy of India, in his 17th September dispatch to London had stated that ‘this is said to be the largest ever procession in Calcutta in which around 5 lakh people took part.’”²⁴

The tributes to the Martyr poured from a vast spectrum of public men not only from India but also from abroad. Among the most notable tributes was one Mrs. Mary ScSwiny, the widow of legendary Irish revolutionary MsSwiney who had laid down his life after a record 74 days of hunger strike in 1920: **‘Family of Msswiney unites with India in grief and pride on death of Jatindra Nath Das. Freedom will come.’**

So much so, Mr Cordon Noad, Government Advocate, paid a touching tribute in the open Court on the next working day, “With the permission of the court I ask leave on behalf of my colleagues and myself to say a brief word of reference to the tragic events which have occurred since the last sitting of the court. I desire on behalf of us all the express sincere regret and genuine sorrow which we feel on account of the untimely death of Jatinder Nath Das. There are qualities which compel admiration of all men alike and prominent among them are qualities of courage and constancy in the pursuit of an ideal. Although, we do not share the ideal which he followed, we cannot but admire the unwavering fortitude and firmness of purpose he displayed. Therefore, we whose duty is to conduct prosecution, may also be permitted to express, in the court, our personal sentiments of respect for the deceased.”

The Magistrate associated himself with the sentiments expressed by the Government Advocate.

Azad and Bhagwati board the train

“As the train steamed off (from Delhi) and I (Kiron) returned in

the attached compartment in which others accompanying the coffin were seated, Durga Devi confided to me that two of the much wanted absconders were found travelling in the train and she requested me to meet them when it halted at Mathura.

Similar scenes were observed at Mathura. I slipped in the compartment carrying the coffin and as soon as the train steamed off I was lovingly embraced by the two gallants patriots, who, by themselves had already created history; they left as Agra after consoling me.

Gandhiji stays aloof

“Azad was agitated when he learnt that Mahatma Gandhi was not on the platform even when he was camping at Agra.”

And ‘Father of the Nation’ abstains from paying tribute to the Martyr, keeping mum, and justifies his silence vide his write up in ‘Young India’ of 17th October 1929.²⁵

After the martyrdom of Das Pandit Moti Lal Nehru moving the adjournment motion in Central Assembly on 14 September 1929 said that his “...charge was that in dealing with such matters the government has lacked human spirit. The charge is that when a human being was dying slowly the government was not doing anything which was its duty to do....” Condemning the government in strong words he said, “Every day the news came that Dass’ life was slipping away and that he would die any time. The news was that other hunger strikers were also in a critical condition. What was the government doing all this while? Sir, it is said when Rome was burning Nero was playing his violin. Our merciful government has marched one step ahead of Nero. It was playing the violin on the deathbed of these young men. May be these young men are on a wrong path but still they are patriots! They see them dying by inches. What did they do? When it was time to act, when it was time for the government to feel that these dedicated men would not abandon their ideals howsoever long they might have to continue their hunger strike, what action did it take to save their valuable lives?

Supporting the motion Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya said, “I want the government to remember of what character these accused person are! They are not commonplace criminals. They have not done anything for their petty selfish interests. All of them are patriots of high moral order and their minds are fired with the idea of the freedom of the country.” Thus after putting the government in the dock Mr.

Malaviya said, “The government failed to focus its attention to this fact that these people, who had been huddled together in Lahore were men of highest ideals and they are filled with the spirit of national self respect....”

Supporting the motion Mr. Amar Nath Dutt of Bengal warned the government in harsh words quoting the prophecy of Rabindra Nath Tagore and said:

The load of your sins will become heavy,
Your boat will sink
Your flag will roll in dust.

The prophecy of the poet was vindicated. The villainy of the British rulers increased, the bundle of its sins became heavier and heavier, and when the time came a spark of the pyre of a patriot became a conflagration after eighteen years, the smoke became a hurricane and the so called impregnable boat of the Queen of the seas, which she boasted of, weighed down with the sins, tumbled, was caught in the tempest and sank. India became free!

Yatindra Das’ group would rightly sing:

*Waqt aane par batayenge tujhe ai asman,
Ham abhi se kya batayen
Kya hamare dil men hai.*

[Let time come, we shall tell you O, heavens,
How should we tell you at this moment
What is in our minds!]²⁶

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- 14 Shiv Verma, *op. cit.*, pp. 140.
- 15 Ajoy Ghosh, *op. cit.*, p. 32.
- 16 Shiv Verma, *op. cit.*, pp. 126-127.
- 17 Dr. Gurdev Singh Deol, *op. cit.*, p. 66.
- 18 *Ibid.*, pp. 68-69.
- 19 *The Tribune*, 4 September 1929.
- 20 Dr. Gurdev Singh Deol, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
- 21 A.G. Noorani: *Trial of Bhagat Singh — Politics of Justice*, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2005, p. 76.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 279.
- 23 *Ibid.*, pp. 273-274.
- 24 Shiv Verma, *op. cit.*, pp. 108-111.
- 25 Kiron Das, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-61.
- 26 Shiv Verma, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-112.

13

THE MAGISTERIAL TRIAL

The Tribune, Thursday, July 11, 1929

SAUNDERS' MURDER CASE OPENS

GOVERNMENT ADVOCATE OUTLINES THE CASE

Hindustan Republican Army

AIMS AND OBJECTS OF CONSPIRACY

Trial in Central Jail

Lahore, July 10.

The Saunders' Murder Case opened today in the court of Rai Sahib Pandit Sri Krishen, Special Magistrate. The trial was held in the Central Jail, and the approaches to the places of the trial were guarded by a large body of armed police. The Legal Remembrancer, the Deputy-Inspector General of the C.I.D., the District Magistrate, the Senior Superintendent of Police, K.B. Abdul Aziz, Superintendent, C.I.D., the special investigation Officer and other police officers were present during the whole of part of the proceedings. The general public was not admitted to the room where the court was held, and the relations of the accused got permits for admission after considerable difficulty. Even the counsel appearing for the accused persons were stopped at the door, and could obtain admission after some delay and difficulty.

The accused were brought to the court in handcuffs and seated on benches. Bhagat Singh and Dutt were brought separately, and entering the court shouted, "Long Live Revolution" and "Down with Imperialism" which were echoed back by the other accused. These shouts continued for some minutes.

The Crown was represented by Mr. C.H. Carden Noad,

Government Advocate assisted by K.B. Kalandar Ali Khan and Mr. Gopal Lal, Advocates, and Bakshi Dina Nath, prosecuting Inspector. The accused were defended by Lala Duni Chand, Malik Barkat Ali, Mehta Amin Chand, Lala Bishan Nath, Mr. Amolak Ram Kapur, Mr. Dewan Chand Khanna, Mr. W. Chandra Dutt and Mehta Puran Chand.

There are altogether 32 men implicated in the case of whom 7 have turned approvers. Of the remaining 25, as many as nine are absconding. The following sixteen accused were today produced in court:— Sukh Dev, Kishori Lal, Agya Ram, Des Raj, Prem Dutt, Surendranath Panday, Jai Dev Kapur, Sheo Varma, Gaya Prashad, Jatindranath Das, Mahabir Singh, Bhagat Singh, Bhatkeshwar Dutt, Ajoy Kumar Ghosh, Kamal Nath and Jatindernath Sanyal.

Court Prohibits Shouts

The Court, at this stage, recorded an order prohibiting the shouts of "Long Live Revolution" and "Down with Imperialism" being raised in the court room. It was alleged by Lala Duni Chand, who was the counsel sitting nearest the Magistrate, that the wordings of the order had been actually dictated in court by K.S. Kalandar Ali Khan, the Public Prosecutor. Lala Duni Chand took serious objection to this, and said it was no part of the duty of the Crown counsel to frame the order of the court.

K.S. Kalandar Ali Khan denied having done so.

Lala Duni Chand said he did not represent all the accused, but would advise them not to raise such shouts.

Court:— Every sane man would object to such shouts.

"SMALLER JAIL."

Lala Duni Chand also objected to the court holding its sittings in a portion of the Jail. The so-called court-room, he submitted, was surrounded on all sides by the police and was itself a small jail. The relations and friends of the accused were waiting outside on the roadside and not permitted to enter the so-called courtroom. Some female relations of the accused had also been refused admission. The admission should not be arbitrarily restricted by permits.

Court:— Should the whole city come here?

Counsel:— Everybody who wants to come should be admitted provided there is room.

The court, at this stage, issued more permits for some of the

relations of the accused who had been waiting outside.

ACCUSED PERSON ABUSED.

Mr. Prem Dutt one of the accused persons, complained to the court that a police constable who was on duty to keep guard over him had used abusive language towards him in court. He requested that the constable in question should be removed from the place, otherwise, he (accused) would be compelled to take the law into his own hands.

Mehta Puran Chand, counsel for the accused, urged that in view of the complaint, the constable should be removed from his present duty.

Court:— How do you say that he did abuse the accused?

Mr. Amolak Ram Kapur, another defence counsel, submitted that the incident had happened only a few minutes before in open court and there were several witnesses to it. The matter had been immediately brought to the notice of the court, and it was the duty of the court to make inquiries. It was a serious matter, and if the court refused to look into it the accused might have to lodge a complaint under section 504, I.P.C.

The court refused to take notice of the matter and ignored the complaint.

RIGHT OF COUNSEL

Mehta Amin Chand, one of the defence counsel, next complained of the restrictions imposed on the persons desiring to attend the court. The car of the counsel was stopped at some distance from the place where the court was holding its sitting, and he was told by the police that the King's highway was closed to the public and the counsel of the accused, and only the cars of the Magistrate and the *Sarkari Vakil* could go that way. After considerable difficulty and waiting for several minutes he was permitted to proceed to the gate, but he was again obstructed there and not permitted to enter because he had waited for some minutes that a European police officer went up to him and said in a patronising tone, "I give you permission to enter." Such treatment of a member of the bar was most objectionable." Does the police rule the Court?" asked Counsel. He claimed the right to enter the court without any permit. Proceeding, counsel referred to the provisions of section 353, Cr.P.C., and submitted that everyone had a right to enter the court, if accommodation was available. There was no legal

justification for holding the proceedings in a closed room and shutting out the relations and friends of the accused who had to instruct counsel. The restrictions imposed were illegal and arbitrary and likely to handicap the accused in their defence.

Mr. Carden Noad pointed out that no discrimination was made between members of the bar and others or between the prosecuting counsel and the defence counsel. There was not enough room in the hall for all who desired admission.

Mr. W.C. Dutt and Malik Barkat Ali told the court that they were also obstructed at the gate and asked to produce permits. Malik Barkat Ali also pointed out that the Government Advocate and another European came, when he was stopped outside the gate, and they went straight in without any one questioning them or asking them to produce a permit. Counsel asked the sub-Inspector on duty the reason of that discrimination and was informed that the Government Advocate and Europeans did not require a pass.

Mr. Noad, at this stage, invited the attention of the court to the fact that some of the persons present in Court were giving flowers to the accused, which was objectionable.

The court overruled the objection of the defence counsel regarding the restrictions of admission and held that "to control congestion and congregation of people" it was necessary to regulate admission by passes, but every facility would be given to the relations of the accused to get admission.

COMPLAINT FILED

The Government Advocate filed the orders of the Government sanctioning the prosecution under the Explosive Substances Act and Sections 121, 121-A, 122 and 123 of the Penal Code.

Mr. Hamilton Harding, Senior Superintendent of Police, Lahore, filed the formal complaint under the order of the Government:—

The following is a copy of the complaint, filed today by Mr. Hamilton Harding, Senior Superintendent of Police, in the Court of R.S. Pandit Sri Krishan, Special Magistrate, against the following:—

1. Sukh Dev *alias* Dyal, *alias* Swami, *alias* Villager, son of Ram Lal, caste Thapar Khatri, of Mohalla Arya Samaj, Layallpur.
2. Kishori Lal Rattan, *alias* Deo Datt Rattan, *alias*

- Mast Ram Shastri, son of Raghbar Dutt, Caste Brahman of Dharampur, P.S. Hajipur, District Hoshiarpur.
3. Agya Ram *alias* Masterji, son of Nand Lal Brahman, of Lalla, R.S. Killa Sobha Singh, District Sialkot.
 4. Des Raj, son of Ram Kishen, caste Khatri, of Belgan, P.S. Sambrial, District Sialkot.
 5. Prem Dutt *alias* Master *alias* Amrit Lal, son of Ram Datt, Khatri of Gujrat.
 6. Surinder Nath Pandey *alias* Stone, son of Hira Lal Pandey, Brahman, resident of Mohalla Sabzimandi, Cawnpore.
 7. Jai Dev *alias* Harish Chander, son of Babu Salig Ram, caste Khatri Kapur, Saddar Bazar, Hardoi.
 8. Sheo Varma *alias* Parbhat, *alias* Harnarain *alias* Ram Narain, Kapur, son of Kanhiya Lal Varma, Khatri of Hardoi.
 9. Gya Parshad *alias* Dr. B.S. Nigham, Ram Lal *alias* Ram Nath, *alias* Desh Bhagat, caste Kurmi, resident of Khajuri Khurd, P.S. Billhaur, District Cawnpore.
 10. Jatindra Nath Das, son of Banke Behari Das, of 30, Dobar Road, Calcutta.
 11. Mahabir Singh, *alias* Partab of Shahpur Thela, P.S. Rajaka Rampur, District Eta.
 12. Bhagat Singh, son of Kishen Singh of Khwasrian, Lahore.
 13. Bhatkeshwar Dutt, *alias* Battu, *alias* Mohan, son of G.D. Dutt of Bedwan, Bengal.
 14. Ajoy Kumar Ghosh, *alias* Negro General, son of Dr. Ghosh of Cawnpore.
 15. Jatin Sanyal (Jatindra Nath Sanyal) son of Hari Nath Sanyal, Mohalla Colonel-Ganj, of Allahabad.
 16. Kamal Nath Trivedi, *alias* Kanwal Naht Tewari, student of Vidya Sagar College, Calcutta, cson of Suraj Nath Tewari of Saraya, P.S. Gobindpur.
 17. Chandra Shekhar Azad *alias* Panditji, son of Baij Nath Ram *alias* Sita Ram, Brahman of Baijnath Tula, **P.S. Bhilopur, Benares.**

18. Bijoy Kumar Sinha *alias* Bachu, son of Markando Kumar Sinha, of Mohalla Karachi Ganj, Cawnpore.
19. Kailash Pati *alias* Kali Charan, son of Hardo Narain, Kayasth, of Mongranwan, P.S. Ghamirpur, District Azanigarh, at present resident at Gorakhpur.
20. Raghanath *alias* 'M', *alias* Ram Guru of **Benares.**
21. Bhagwati Charan *alias* B.C. Vohra, son of Rai Sahib Shiv Charan Das, caste Brahman of the Lahore.
22. Kundan Lal *alias* Partap *alias* No. 1 of **Benares** (U.P.)
23. Kelash *alias* Gunthala of Jhansi.
24. Yashpal, son of Hira Lal, Khatri of Nadaun, P.S. Hamirpur, District Kangra, now residing at Wachowali Lahore.
25. Satgurdyal, son of Pandit Sukhbasi Lal Avasthi, caste Brahman of Mohalla Dana Khori, Cawnpore.

The complaint is filed under sections 121, 121A, 122 and 123 of the Indian Penal Code.

The complainant respectfully sheweth:—

I. That the accused above mentioned along with others have at Lahore and other places in British India at various times and occasions commencing from the **year 1924** and continuing upto the present time of their arrest been engaged in a conspiracy to wage war against His Majesty the King Emperor and to deprive him of the sovereignty of British India and to overawe by criminal force or show of criminal force the Government established by law in British India and to collect men, arms and munitions for or otherwise to make preparation for the said object and purpose.

II. They further concealed the existence of a design to wage war against the King Emperor intending by such concealment to facilitate or knowing it to be likely that such concealment would facilitate the waging of such war.

III. With these objects as mentioned in paras. I and II above these accused along with others formed a party known as the **Hindustan Republican Association and Indian Republican Association and Indian Republican Army** and held their meeting at Lahore and other places in British India with a view to overthrow by force the Government established by law in

India and to establish a Federated Republican Government in its stead.

MEANS

IV. That the means devised to be adopted to attain these objects were as follows:—

1. The collection of arms, men and munitions and also money for the purchase of arms and munitions.
2. The obtaining of money for the same purpose by means of forcing and robbing banks and treasuries and by dacoities which necessarily involved murders.
3. The manufacturing of explosive bombs for the purpose of murders and to overawe the Government.
4. Murders of police and other officials and persons interested in or assisting the administration of the Government of British India or persons who obstructed the carrying out of the objects of the conspiracy and persons who proved obnoxious to their party.
5. The blowing up of trains.
6. The production, possession and circulation of seditious and revolutionary literature.
7. The rescue of convicts and persons in lawful custody.
8. The seduction of educated youths with a view to enlist them in the conspiracy.
9. To obtain renewal and subscriptions among persons in foreign countries who were interested in the accomplishment of revolution in India.

V. That in pursuance of the said conspiracy in British India.

1. An attempt was made to murder Mr. Mannerji, Inspector C.I.D. at Benares on 13.1.1928.
2. An embezzlement of Rs. 3,199 was committed by Kailash Pati alias Kali Charan (an absconder) who was an employee in the sub-post official Burhal Ganj, District Gorakhpur, on 26.6.28 to be utilised by the party in furtherance of their common object.

3. A dacoity at Punjab National Bank, Lahore, was attempted on 4.12.1928.
4. Mr. Saunders, Assistant Superintendent of Police and Channan Singh, Head Constable, were murdered in Lahore on 17th December, 1928.
5. A bomb was thrown in the Assembly Chamber (Delhi) and shots were fired therein on 8.4.1929 causing severe injuries to Sir Bomanji Dalal and others.
6. A dacoity at Maulnia was committed on 7.6.1929 causing the death of Dank Mahton Koeri owner of the house.
7. The accused along with others were manufacturing bombs at Lahore, Saharanpore, Calcutta and Agra, the factories at Lahore and Saharanpur having since been captured.
8. The accused visited different towns in British India to seduce youths and to induce men to join their conspiracy.

VI. That in pursuance of the said conspiracy in British India Preparations for the following actions were made but did not succeed:—

1. To blow up the train carrying members of the Simon Commission by means of dynamite.
2. To rescue Jagdish Chandar Chatterji who was a convict in connection with the Kakori Conspiracy Case and Sachin Nath Sanyal, another convict of their party.

VII. That accused Nos. 17 to 25 are absconding and are still at large.

VIII. That the order of the Local Government under section 196, Criminal Procedure Code, duly signed is attached herewith.

IX. That the complainant is informed that in respect of the other offences committed in pursuance of the conspiracy separate police challans have been presented to this Court.

It is, therefore, prayed that the accused above-named be tried for and convicted of the offences enumerated above or any offence or offences which they may be proved to have

committed.¹

Since the period from 10th July till end September 1929 was the phase of hunger-strikes causing the tragic death of Jatin Das, the routine working of the court remained off the track.

Accordingly after the hunger strike was finally called off on 4 October 1929, a Committee of three party members was constituted to make sure that the case proceedings were best utilized for the furtherance of party's aims. It consisted of Bhagat Singh, B.K. Sinha and Sukh Dev.

"First of all, they had to strive for the rights of undertrial political prisoners, since they were being treated like ordinary undertrials facing criminal charges. With their dogged efforts they were able to extract from the authorities a commitment for an honourable treatment, such as comfortable chairs, newspapers, tables, lunching tents etc. which they rightly deserved.

"One of the contentious issues was regarding the entry of visitors. Since the trial took place inside the premises of Lahore Central Jail, such restrictions resulted in very few visitors managing entry to the Court. This was hindering the dissemination of the news of the trial, which was necessary for exposing the hoax of justice and legality. So after about a month's, struggle, during which the under-trials resorted to all kinds of agitational tactics, many of these restrictions were relaxed and thus a greater number of visitors began to attend the court regularly.²

"On October 4, when proceedings were resumed, the accused not only raised the usual slogans "Inqilab Zindabad" and "Down with Imperialism" but sang a song also on the theme:

"Bharat na reh sakega hargiz ghulamkhana"

The Magistrate Rai Sahib Pandit Sri Krishan who appeared as P.W. 405 before the Special Tribunal narrated an interesting anecdote about Raj Guru. "When **Raj Guru**, the accused, was first brought to me on the 15 October 1929, for a remand, he objected to being remanded to police custody and asked he should be committed to jail. He spoke to me in Urdu. I addressed him as follows in Urdu: *Main ne kaha, nam to tumhara Raj Guru hai, aur ilzam tumhare upar yeh hai? To usene jawab diya ki han, mera kam raja ko shiksha dena hai* [Your name is Raj Guru but you are accused on a strange charge. He replied, "Yes, my name is Raj Guru and it is my duty to teach the rulers.].³

"Subhash Chandra Bose watched the proceedings of the case for about three hours on 19th October with Baba Gurdit Singh of *Kamagata*

Maru fame. He was, however, not allowed to meet the accused in the court room. They too had been detained for nearly an hour at the jail gate though they had been granted permits to enter the premises without search. When (advocate) Amolak Ram Kapoor informed the Magistrate about it, he was asked whether they had come to witness the *tamasha*.

"As soon as Bose and others entered the Court room, the accused stood up in the dock and welcomed them with loud shouts of 'Long Live Revolution', 'Long Live the Proletariat' and 'Down, Down with Imperialism'. Bose acknowledged the greetings with folded hands. They were given seats in the press enclosure.⁴

"While the examination of a witness (M.D. Joshi, D.S.P. Saharanpur, PW 230) was proceeding, Jatindra Sanyal, accused, asked the Magistrate, "Sir, I understand that Mr. Kiron Chandra Das is waiting outside. We want he should be allowed to come in.

Magistrate: "I have issued the necessary pass."

Sanyal: "It is an insult to our national self-respect that he should not be allowed to come in without being searched."

Bhagat Singh: "There are persons who are allowed into the court without search. May I know what are the grounds for the search of Kiron?"

Magistrate: "He may be allowed but not without search."

Ajoy Ghosh: "The pass was originally issued for entry without search, but at the instance of C.I.D. it was changed. He was informed that it was for one Karam Chand and not for Kiron."

Ajoy Ghosh: "Why is Kiron asked to be searched, Your Honour?"

Magistrate: "Because he happens to be the brother of Jatin Das." (Laughter)

Bhagat Singh: "Then prosecute him. We don't understand your logic. It is not only an insult to him but to every Indian. You have yourself paid homage to the memory of Jatindra Nath Das. Now you give a practical proof of that homage by not allowing his brother to come in."

Magistrate: "You wish all persons should have been searched."

Bhagat Singh: "We wish you had passed that order."

Magistrate: "But he can come in."

B.K. Sinha: "You want to take vindictive steps: It is a farce of a public trial: It is unnecessary harassment."

Sanyal: "If you feel helpless against the tactic of the C.I.D. you should resign. This is the most honourable course for you." (Laughter)

Magistrate: "This is good suggestion." (Laughter)

Bhagat Singh: "In the morning, Your Honour assured us about the change of attitude. But within two hours, everything has changed."

Sanyal: "Will the British Empire fall to pieces if Kiron is allowed in. In Kakori case trials, Bhai Parmanand was allowed to sit along the accused."

Bhagat Singh: "What impression Mr. Bose will take along from Punjab to Bengal?"⁵

According to the **Magistrate**, "(Approver) Jai Gopal had hardly commenced to give his evidence on 21 October 1929 when the accused uttered cries of 'shame' 'shame' and one of the accused Prem Dutt took off his shoe and threw it at Jai Gopal. A disturbance followed and the accused assumed a threatening attitude endangering the life of the approver and I had to adjourn the proceedings and direct that the accused be removed to jail."⁶

According to **B.K. Sinha**, however, (after the shoe incident) the "Public Prosecutor pointed out that there was danger to the lives of those present in the court and the court should adjourn the proceedings. Before the learned Magistrate passed the order for adjournment, Bhagat Singh, myself and others wanted to make a statement regarding the regrettable incident as there was much scope for misunderstanding. The learned Magistrate did not give us the opportunity to get our statement recorded. We, therefore, hastened to file a written statement — the only course left for us, making it clear that all of us disassociate ourselves from the act committed by one individual. After that petition was made, I think there was no reason why we should be made to suffer for the act of one."⁷

According to **Jatindra Sanyal** soon after the said incident "...orders were passed that the accused should remain handcuffed while in court. Bhagat Singh and others instantly decided that come what may, they will in no case attend the court unless the order was withdrawn. Next day despite the massive deployment of police to forcibly bring the accused prisoners into the court, none of them could be brought there. Of the 16 accused, the police could, somehow get hold of five, loading them into the bus, that too only up to the jail gate, but could not make them get down the bus. Next day the accused agreed to come to the court in handcuffs, provided their handcuffs were removed while they were in the court. Yet this too was not done. So they hit upon a plan: At lunch time, they demanded that while they

took food, their handcuffs should be taken off. It was done. After the lunch was over, policemen advanced towards them for handcuffing them. The accused refused point blank to allow this. A scuffle ensued thereafter between the police and the accused. But the police failed to subdue them. Thereupon '*Pathan*' policemen were summoned who beat the accused mercilessly.

"This thrashing was specially cruel for Bhagat Singh, he being their pet target. Eight ferocious *Pathans* fell on Bhagat Singh with lathis and kicks with heavy uniform shoes. This episode took place in full public view of the visitors, which included some ladies too. All this had a wide impact. A highly attended protest meeting was held in Lahore where the atrocious conduct of the police was severely condemned. Most of the national papers also expressed similar sentiments.

"Not satisfied with the beating of accused in the court, one day, the police resorted to the same barbaric conduct after the court proceedings had been adjourned for the day. In the jail premises, a most merciless assault was launched on Bhagat Singh. However, these sufferings had an unintended fallout: Police and Jail authorities, both, conceded in their respective reports submitted on the matter, that too categorically that though it was within their power to beat the accused to the maximum possible extent, even to the extent of beating them dead, but it was well nigh impossible for them to bring the accused to the court. Thence court had to eat a humble pie by withdrawing its draconian order.

"Thus, the revolutionaries in their showdown with their tormentors came out victorious with a high moral score though with grievously battered physical frames!

Once, on 24th October, the undertrials raised the issue of not allowing the student visitors into the court. Bhagat Singh stated, "If accused, some of whom are students, are allowed in the dock, why should not the students be in the visitors' gallery? Section 352 of Criminal Procedure Code (now Section 327) says that the place where any Criminal Court is held, shall be deemed an open Court, to which the public generally may have an access so far as the same can conveniently contain them. Under that Section, you cannot stop any particular class of the public from having access to the court room. Your order is, therefore, illegal. Moreover some of accused are students and their student friends who take interest in the case should be allowed

admission. I will, therefore, request you, Sir, to reconsider your order.”

The court did not accept the request.⁹

Regarding the attitude of the accused towards the proceedings of this Court, **Jatindra** Sanyal writes, “During the course of trial proceedings, the accused themselves cross-examined the prime prosecution witnesses in general and the approvers in particular. Unlike the usual mode of cross examination by defence side, namely, to damage the credibility of a witness, or to highlight the contradictions in his testimony, here the accused aimed at eliciting such kind of replies which expounded the party’s ideals, the real intention behind a revolutionary action, the patriotic and selfless spirit behind their activities in general, and the preparations made for these activities and the like. Truly, this was the strategy of Bhagat Singh and his comrades to disseminate explicitly the message of selflessness and patriotism to country’s youth.”¹⁰

Continues Jatindra “Whenever the accused got an opportunity to stage a demonstration, they exploited it to the hilt. In the open court they observed ‘Kakori Day’ ‘Lenin day’, ‘May Day’ ‘Lajpat Day’ etc. Not just this, on special occasions like the death of famous revolutionary Shyamji Krishan Verma and the death of a political prisoner in a hunger strike in Hungary, they demonstrated to convey the fraternal sentiments. The prosecution side in the case invariably brought on record all these actions and utterances; while doing so it was working on the strategy that the accused, by their conduct, were in fact damaging their own line of defence, thereby making their task of convicting the accused easier. The accused on their part were least bothered about the charges against them for which they were being tried. For them the court was for all intents and purposes, the forum to disseminate their message to the countrymen in general and to the youth in particular.”¹¹

A significant feature of the Magisterial trial was the conduct of Identification Parades of the accused, on which the prosecution laid great emphasis, presuming that this would provide best corroboration of the statements of the approvers.

In Chapter III of the Final Verdict of The Special Tribunal, titled ‘General Corroboration of the Approvers’ much emphasis had been placed on the identification of the accused by sundry PWs.

Accused-wise, Dr Gaya Prasad was identified by 71, Bhagat Singh by 51, Shiv Verma by 49, Raj Guru by 38, Bijoy Kumar Sinha by 33, Sukh Dev by 28 and Jai Dev Kapoor by 23 PWs in identification

parades.¹²

List of articles recovered by police on 2.5.1929 from the house of Bhagat Singh’s father, S. Kishan Singh in the upper storey of house No. 2 of Basheshar Das in Suha Bazar, Lahore city in the presence of Kultar Singh S/o Kishan Singh R/o of Tibba Farid, Lahore Excerpts:

At Sr. No. (Total items = 29)

4. A paper containing two coloured printed photos on which was written ‘Mewar Gaurav’, one photo is of ‘Virangana’ and the other of Maharana Partap.
5. A leaf torn from the ‘Kirti’ Magazine Amritsar, which has two photos of Bhai Kartar Singh (Sarabha).
6. A piece of paper containing a printed photo of Thakur Prithvi Singh (*Ghadrite*).
10. A leaf from the ‘Kirti’ Magazine in which there is a printed photo of Sardar (Bhai) Santokh Singh (*Ghadrite*).
12. A printed article titled ‘Wealth of Nations’ by Hardyal.
13. An envelope containing a typed letter in English (Rio de Janero-October 26, 1928) addressed to Bhagat Singh. In the end it bears the signature of H.K. and A.S. It is written on two leaves. On the envelope there is the address of Bhagat Singh.
21. A pamphlet in English ‘The Young Liberator’.
23. A bound book in English ‘Face to Face with Kaiserism’.
24. A bound book in English ‘The Oppressors of the poor’ by C. F. Andrews.
26. A copy of an article in Urdu ‘Punjab ke Political Sardar’. (Vol. III, Ex PCQ, page 230)¹³

As for the Court proceedings in general, Bhagat Singh and Dutt wrote a letter to the Magistrate on 9 February 1930 explaining the grounds of their refusal to attend the Court.

One — It was contended that the majority of the accused belonged to the distant provinces and all being middle class people find it very difficult to travel to Lahore and help their kin who were under trial. In the alternative the Court did not allow interview to those who had been given power of attorney in this regard by the family to help their relatives in the trial.

Two — The unrepresented accused could not afford to arrange a whole-time counsel to represent them throughout the lengthy trial.

Third — The third main grievance was about the non-supply of

newspapers. Under-trials should not be treated as convicts and only such restrictions can justifiably be imposed upon them as may be necessary for their safe custody. The accused who, cannot be released on bail should not be subjected to such hardships as it may amount to punishment. Promises made in regard to newspapers had been observed more in breach than in observance.

“Hence, these are the main grounds on which we announced on 29th January our refusal to come to the Court. As soon as our grievances are removed, we will ourselves quite willingly attend the Court.

“Finally, on February 19, 1930 the Government of India issued a press communiqué on the classification of convicted prisoners and under-trials. Ever ready to respond to any conciliatory gesture, the accused gave up the hunger strike the very next day. But as Ajoy Ghosh recalled in his memoirs, the Government soon went back on its assurances. All the accused were placed in ‘C’ class and treated with vindictive brutality.

“The case was adjourned from February 8 to March 8 as a result of the hunger strike.

“From March 8, onwards the proceedings went on relatively smoothly till May 3, the last day of the proceeding before the Magistrate. Two days earlier an Ordinance had been promulgated to set up a Tribunal to try the case. That, public prosecutor Noad paid tributes to Pandit Sri Krishan’s impartiality was understandable. Yet, despite the treatment he had meted out to them, Bhagat Singh spoke without rancour. His words revealed the man.

“Thanking the Magistrate on behalf of his comrades and himself, Bhagat Singh said that he wanted to tell the Magistrate that although on occasions they had to defy the bureaucracy, whose representative the Magistrate was, they had nothing to say against him personally. He remarked that the Magistrate was polite and too lenient and the prosecution had taken advantage of his leniency many a time while the accused did not try to do so.”

“Bhagat Singh was as free from hate as he was from fear.”¹⁴

As aside:

Viceregal Train Bomb incident

During the period of Magisterial trial an attempt was made on the life of Viceroy Lord Irwin by revolutionaries.

Intelligence Bureau, Government of India in its compilation

‘Terrorism in India, 1917-1936’ states:

Further activities by remnants of the party

“Yashpal, who had earlier been connected with the party but appears to have remained in the background, now came to the fore with Bhagwati Charan, and these two decided to wreck the Viceroy’s train. They used Inderpal, who had been enlisted by Yashpal, to watch the railway line near Delhi in the guise of a Sadhu and persuaded Hans Raj ‘Wireless’, who had a reputation for great skill in electrical matters, to arrange a mine to be exploded by electricity. The mine which contained T.N.T. was laid under a sleeper and connected by over 300 yards of ‘flex’ wire buried 3 inches in the ground to a battery and the switch hidden near the Purana Qila, Delhi. Yashpal, dressed for the occasion in a military uniform complete with breeches and gaiters accompanied by Bhag Ram, exploded the mine at 7.40 A.M. on December 23, 1929 but fortunately no loss of life occurred, although two feet of rail were blown out and some fragments were forced through the floor of a coach to find lodgement in its roof. A motor cycle purchased by Yashpal for his escape after the crime could not be made to work and was abandoned after the offence.¹⁵

“Early next morning Lahore police arrested Virender, Sukhdev Raj, Dhanwantri, Kiron Chandra Das, Dr. Banarasi Das, Com. Ram Kishan, B.A. (National), Ahsan Ilahi and Milkhi Ram in Lahore, some in the Congress camp and others in their houses on suspicion of being involved in the conspiracy to dynamite train in Delhi. They were released on 10th January 1930 on bail of Rs. 50,000-each.

“Gandhi ji disapproved the action. He wrote an article in ‘Young India’ titled ‘Cult of the Bomb’. In reply Bhagwati Charan Vohra wrote a leaflet ‘Philosophy of the Bomb.’ Azad got it printed and it was widely distributed throughout India by the H.S.R.A. and its allies on January 26, 1930.”¹⁶

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- 3 *Proceedings in Lahore Conspiracy Case*, Urdu Version. P.1335./

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 - 5 *Ibid.*, pp. 104-105.
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 - 10 Jatin Sanyal, *op. cit.*, p. 94.
 - 11 *Ibid.*, p. 95.
 - 12 Malwinder Jit Singh Waraich, Rajwanti Mann, *op. cit.*, pp. xxiii-
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14

SPECIAL TRIBUNAL — A ‘STEAM ROLLER’ (A REPLICA OF 1915-17 GHADR TRIALS)

Strangely enough even the learned author of the classic “Trial of Bhagat Singh”, Mr. A.G. Noorani had, in his preface to the book had called it a unique event in the history of political trials. Later, when this writer provided to him, his book, *War Against King Emperor: Ghadr of 1914-15 — the Verdict in Lahore Conspiracy Cases I and II*, he was generous enough to revise his preface in the second edition of his path-breaking book to recognise the significance of 1914-15 trials as also their impact on Bhagat Singh:

“Bhagat Singh’s life and thinking hold lessons for the terrorist and state alike. He grew up in an atmosphere in which, disillusioned with the moderates’ politics, many a patriot took to revolutionary politics. We owe to Professors Malwinder Jit Singh and Harinder Singh a full account of the Ghadr movement of 1914-15 based on the judgements by the Special Tribunal in what they were ‘truly’ the first Lahore Conspiracy Cases (*War Against King Emperor: Ghadr of 1914-15 — A Verdict by Special Tribunal*, published by Bhai Sahib Randhi Singh Trust, Ludhiana, 2001).

Perhaps a few historians of Bhagat Singh era are aware of the fact that the Martyr was, very nearly, ‘possessed’ by the boyish hero of Ghadr movement Kartar Singh Sarabha who was martyred when he was just 19½: That Bhagat Singh had keenly studied the judgement of the First Lahore Conspiracy of 1914-15, profusely underlining the text, besides writing his own comments on its margin is rarely known: This very manuscript was accessed by this author for compiling the above mentioned book.

These trials rightly earned the notoriety wherein there was “*Na Vakeel, Na Daleel, Na Apeel*” — Sans Counsels, Sans Pleading, Sans Appeal.

Hundreds of *Ghadrites* were tried, fifty or so were sentenced

to death, three times of that number consigned to transportation for life, the remaining few to lesser sentences with a rare acquittal or discharge.

Juxtaposed, Special Tribunals of 1915, and those of 1930 were distinct only *qua* the legal sanctions behind each; Whereas the earlier ones were set up under Defence of India Rules: 1915, a wartime measure, its 1930 version was set up under a special Ordinance III of 1930 as an emergency measure.

Govt's Justification: "The trial has been in progress for more than 9 months and during that time it has been possible to examine about 230 witnesses only out of a total of 607. The spectacle of these proceedings obstructed by unprecedented delays, and repeatedly disturbed by disorderly conduct and revolutionary demonstrations, has tended to bring the administration of justice into contempt, and it is impossible to count upon obtaining a conclusion by the *normal methods of procedure* within any calculable period."¹

Finality of proceedings of Tribunal: The judgement of the Tribunal shall be final and conclusive and, notwithstanding the provisions of the Code or of any other law for the time being in force, or of anything having the force of law by whatsoever authority made or done, there shall be no appeal from any order or sentence of the Court, and the High Court shall not have authority to revise any such order or sentence or to transfer any case from the Tribunal, or to make any order under section 491 of the Code or have any jurisdiction of any kind in respect of any proceedings under this Ordinance.²

The prosecution witnesses went through examination in chief *ex-parte* and the accused were not called upon to cross examine them the fag end, i.e., 1.9.1930.³

The accused having refused to produce any defence witnesses, the Public Prosecutor commenced his arguments on 1 September 1930. He concluded his arguments on 10th September and the case was adjourned to the next day. The accused resisted their production on that day and the order was then passed dispensing with their attendance up to the 8 October 1930.... The case was at the same time adjourned to 8th of October 1930.⁴

In so far as Bhagat Singh was concerned "he had told the Special Magistrate (on 3.5.1930) that the appointment of the Tribunal was a (moral) victory for the accused because from the very beginning they

wanted to expose the Government and bring home to the public that there was no law. By appointing the Tribunal the Government has shown themselves in its true colours. So indeed it had.

"The tribunal had been set up under section 72 of the 1919 Government of India Act, stating that: 'The Governor General in India, may, in cases of emergency, make and promulgate ordinances for the peace and good Government of British India or any part thereof and any ordinances so made shall, for the space of not more than six months' from its promulgation have the like force of law as an act passed by Legislature.'"⁵

"If there were 600 witnesses in the Lahore case, who gave the Viceroys the assurance that the case would be finished by the Tribunal within six months even if the accused enthusiastically cooperated with it?

"The ordinance could not last a day longer than that. Its expiry by efflux of time spelt the demise of its creature, Tribunal. The Viceroy sought to ensure despatch by investing the Tribunal with "powers to deal with wilful obstruction." Thus the Judges appointed to serve on it were told from the start that the accused were obstructionists and they were advisedly endowed with power to bring them to heel. Uniquely, this was a Criminal Court on the head of whose judges dangled a Damocles' sword requiring them to speed up things or exit from the scene in ignominy.⁶

The Tribunal was empowered to pass any sentence including the death sentence and its verdict was final. Since the *Ghadr* trials, such kinds of trials were viewed by the public at large by their hall mark "*Na Vakil, Na Daleel, Na Apeel*."

"Imposition of six months' dead line by the ordinance was destructive of confidence all around. The Tribunal was determined to hustle through; the accused acquired a vested interest in delay."⁷

The proceedings of the case extended to a little less than 900 printed pages. A mind-boggling figure of 457 P.W. had been examined in addition to sundry Court witnesses such as the Jail superintendent, etc., sometimes numbering 7 everyday, testifying to the effect that the accused were wilfully refraining from coming to the Court.

On 6th May, the Tribunal asked each of the accused in the matter of being represented by the Counsel at the expense of the Government: Practically all of them showed little interest in being represented through any counsel.

12.5.1930 Order

Owing to the disorderly conduct of the accused, the case is adjourned to tomorrow.

12th of May, 1930

J. Coldstream,
G.C. Helton,
Agha Haider.

The Court was cleared and the accused were removed.

Order

I was not a party to the order of removal of the accused from the Court to the jail and I was not responsible for it any way. I disassociate myself from all that took place in the consequence of that order.

12 May 1930

Agha Haider

A daring act: Sukh Dev

According to Verinder, Sardar Bhagat Singh and his comrades had sung patriotic revolutionary songs and raised their favourite slogans in the Court on that day which led to this situation.

That the 'Court was cleared and the accused were removed' was just a euphemism for barbaric treatment meted out to the accused similar to what they were subjected to earlier in the Court of the Special Magistrate.

13 May 1930

Assistant Jailer reported that no accused except Sukh Dev could be produced in the Court today because they have refused to come unless brought by force. We had orders not to use force.

"They said that if the President of the Tribunal offered an unqualified apology for the orders passed yesterday, they would come."

Order

In view of the disturbances that took place yesterday, the Tribunal have given their careful consideration to the matter and decided that the proceedings of the Court must be conducted with judicial decorum and no disorderly conduct will be tolerated including singing and shouting while the Tribunal is sitting.... We consider it our duty to see that the proceedings are not obstructed and we want to make it

absolutely clear to all the persons concerned that we will take such legal measures open to us including the removal of the accused, as may be considered necessary for the proper conduct of the procedure.

Sd/- Coldstream,
Agha Haider
G. C. Hilton

Adjourned to 14 May, The accused remanded to custody and to be produced at the hearing.

13th May 1930

Coldstream⁹

On 14th May, the report of the Assistant Jailer was identical to the earlier one (of 13th May).

Court order: With reference to proceedings of yesterday and the above order, we record that we are of the opinion that each of the accused by refusing to attend Court willfully conducted himself to the serious prejudice of the trial within the meaning and intention of section 9 (1) of the Ordinance.¹⁰

A bolt from the blue: Bhagwati Charan's Martyrdom

"Amidst all these things the plan to rescue the Lahore Case heroes — Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt was finalized.

"The rescue plan was to be executed under the command of Azad. The rest of the management was kept in the hands of Bhagwati Charan. To assist them Sukhdev Raj, Yashpal, Tehal Singh, Lekh Ram, Dhanwantri, Chhail Bihari and Kailashpati were selected. As per Bhagwati Charan's plan all of these people began to practise shooting. Bhagwati Charan had to manage bombing operation, and Azad the shooting in the rescue attempt.

"June 1st (Sunday, 1930) was fixed for the action. It had been decided to use the explosive material which had been previously stored for the occasion of assault at Delhi on Viceroy's train. Bombshells were there and Yashpal was asked to fill the explosive material in these shells to complete the bombs which was done. Three days before the action that is on 28th May, Bhagwati Charan decided to test the bomb. He selected Zakhira, a dense forest near Ravi river, Lahore, a hidden place for the test. He took Vaishampayan and Sukhdev Raj with him. Unfortunately, the trigger was loose and the bomb burst all of a sudden in his hands. Bhagwati Charan's elbow was blown off. His entrails had come out. Sukhdev Raj's foot was also injured. How

to get instantaneous help was the question. Vaishampayan was new to the place. So wounded and bleeding Sukhdev Raj made up his mind to go and inform the party. Vashampayan started to nurse Bhagwati Charan. He tore off all clothes to bandage the wounds and stop bleeding but in vain....By the time rescue team arrived, Bhagwati Charan had died in pain and agony. He was wrapped in a *chadder* and buried on the spot. A minute's silence and salute of comrades was the last homage to this low profile author of Manifestoes of *Naujwan Bharat Sabha* and H.S.R.A., as also of 'The Philosophy of the Bomb.'¹¹

Proceedings

The accused continued to be absent till 23rd June. Meanwhile statements of 25 P.W.s including those of 7 approvers were recorded. One of the approvers P.W. 7, Ram Saran Das, an old *Ghadrite*, dropped a bombshell in the Court on 13th May just before concluding his statement:

"I wish to be sent to the jail and not to police lockup. I wish to produce in a document which shows how approvers are tutored. I hand in the document. I do not wish to remain in the custody of the police. This document was given to me by a police officer, who told me to learn it by heart.

"This was shown to me, off and on by the officer who was with me. It passed on from officer to officer as they changed. I hand in another document."

Court order: Let this witness be sent to judicial lockup and not kept in the custody of the police. He should be produced in the Court tomorrow. He should not be allowed to converse with the accused persons in the case.¹²

Appointment of new judges

The accused being absent and time being required by the newly appointed Judges of the Tribunal to study the past proceedings, the case is adjourned to 10 A.M. Monday, the 23rd of June, 1930.

The accused are remanded to custody; to be produced on that date.

21st June 1930

G.C. Hilton¹³

(Vol. II, P. 281)

According to Ram Chander: "Coldstream.... privately expressed his inability to the Government to conduct the work of the Tribunal. It

is said that to get rid of Agha Haider in the Tribunal he was offered a berth in Viceroy's council which he disdainfully refused.¹⁴

"As a result, the Viceroy through another Ordinance appointed a new Tribunal consisting of Justice Hilton, Justice Adul Qadar and Justice Tapp. Both Coldstream and Justice Agha Haider were kept out."

A.G. Noorani has branded the newly constituted Tribunal as a hand picked Tribunal.¹⁵

On 23rd June all the accused except Agya Ram were present. An order was passed in regard to Counsel, previously engaged at Crown expenses (which Counsel subsequently withdrew from the case). Ajoy Ghosh now states that he wishes Amar Das to be re-appointed to represent him and Prem Dutt states he wishes Mr. Baljit Singh to be re-appointed to represent him. Des Raj is not present in a position to make a statement but will make in due course. Kishori Lal wants Mr. Amolak Ram Kapur to represent him instead of Mr. Amar Nath.

Order — Tribunal will take steps as soon as possible to arrange Counsels for these accused and so far as possible according to wishes of the accused concerned. In the meanwhile we will proceed with the trial.

Hilton¹⁶

On 24th June all the accused except Agya Ram and Sukh Dev were present. According to the Assistant Jailer (C.W. 1) Sukh Dev stated that he did not recognize the Court and so would not attend. B.K. Dutt also refused to attend. He gave no reason.¹⁷

Observes Noorani "When the Tribunal resumed the hearing the next day, 24 June 1930, Bhagat Singh handed over a statement to the Tribunal recalling the incident of 12 May and their demands. "Since the day (12th May) we have not been attending the Court. Our condition, on which we were prepared to attend the Court, were laid before the Tribunal the next day, namely, that either the President should apologize or should be replaced, by which we never meant that a judge who was a party to that order should take the place of the President. Justice Hilton was a party to the maltreatment as is evident from page 38(A) of the proceedings.

"According to the present constitution of the Tribunal, both the President and the other judge who had disassociated himself from that order of the Tribunal had been replaced by two new judges. The third judge who was a party to that order has now been appointed the

President of the Tribunal.

“In these circumstances, we want to emphasise one thing that we had absolutely no grudge against Mr. Justice Coldstream personally. We had protested against the order passed by the President on behalf of the majority and the subsequent maltreatment meted out to us. We have every respect for Mr. Justice Coldstream and Mr. Justice Hilton that should be *expected from man to man*. As our protest was against a *certain order*, we wanted the President to apologize which meant an apology by the President on behalf of the Tribunal. By removal of that President, the position is not changed, because Mr. Justice Hilton who was a party to that order is presiding in place of Mr. Justice Coldstream. All that we can see is that the present position has added insult to injury.

“**In conclusion** we wish to point out that in case Mr. Justice Hilton disassociates himself from that order referred to above and gives us an assurance for future or is replaced by some other judge, we are prepared to continue coming to this Court, otherwise we shall have to refuse to attend the Court from tomorrow.”

Comments Noorani, “The language was not only dignified but graceful. If the Tribunal has shown a modicum of these qualities in its response to the young men’s pleas, a new chapter could have opened in the record of the proceedings. It was not. Hilton continued as before. The next day, 25th June, the dock was completely vacant.¹⁸

From 25th June onwards the accused resumed their boycott of the Court proceedings.

Identification of accused in their absence was done on 2nd July.

“...Their presence in the Court for the identification purposes, is impracticable. It is open to the prosecutor to produce in the meanwhile any other available evidence for the purpose of proving the identity of the persons concerned.

“Subject to any objection or argument, which may be advanced before us on behalf of the defence in any future stage of the trial, we are prepared to admit as evidence in this connection such evidence as is referred to in section 288 Cr. P. C. an evidence regarding proceedings taken at identification parades, already held or to be held in future.¹⁹

Further proceedings continued in the absence of the accused. Of the 48 PWs examined till 10 July 1930, when the charges were framed, two PWs — PW 38 — Dr. Swan who performed Post Mortem examination on Saunders’ body and PW 6 — Inspector Fearn, a key

eye witness of murder — also made statements before the Court regarding Saunders’ murder. Post Mortem report of Saunders did not show any injury on his head (contrary to the common belief) and the only injury presumably inflicted by Raj Guru had hit the victim on the chest, which fractured his 5th Rib, which was fractured but the bullet had not pierced the chest cavity.

On 10th July: Master Agya Ram and Surindra Pandey were discharged for lack of evidence.

So was B.K. Dutt also.

Charges framed

Fifteen accused were to face the charges to:

- 1) Possess arms and ammunition and to go about armed without license,
- 2) Commit and attempt to commit murder,
- 3) Commit robbery and dacoity,
- 4) Manufacture, possess and have under (their) control explosive substance,
- 5) Rescue and attempt to rescue persons detained in lawful custody, and
- 6) Wage and attempt to wage war against His Majesty the King Emperor of India.

Order

The Tribunal have framed charges against 15 accused persons. We adjourn the case to 10 AM tomorrow and will then take the pleas of these fifteen accused persons on the charges framed. As the accused persons are not present in the Court today, their attendance having been dispensed with under Section 9 of the Ordinance, we order that fifteen copies of these charges be served on the fifteen accused persons concerned in the jail to-day, together with the copies of the order.

10th July 1930

Hilton
Abdul Qadir
Tapp²⁰

11th July — Copies of orders had been served. In view of the non-appearance of the accused, and refusal to make statement in regard to the charges framed against them, We direct that all the fifteen persons *shall be deemed not to plead guilty* in respect of all the heads of charges framed against them.

Order

We adjourn the case to 10 A.M. tomorrow, ...when the accused persons will be required to state whether they wish to cross examine any, and if so, which of the P.W.s whose evidence had been taken.... Copy of the order be served on them.²¹

12th July — All accused absent.

Hunger strike w. e. f. 28th July 1930

According to CW 1 Bakshi Lal Chand, Assistant Jailer, all the accused except Prem Dutt, Kundan Lal and Des Raj were on hunger strike since 28.7.30.

4th August — The hunger strikers were not brought to the main gate as per the orders of Medical officer. Police S.I. went to their barrack to ask them to come to the Court. They refused.

11th August — Report by (CW 10) Dr. (Major) Fazal Ud-Din:

Bhagat Singh, on account of voluntary hunger strike is unable to attend the Court. Even if he was prepared to do so, he would not be able to follow the proceedings if brought to Court.

Order: His attendance dispensed with.

CW 1: All the accused in Borstal Institute are medically fit but refused to attend the Court (13 August).

On 14, 15 and 16 August — identical orders were passed/recorded.

18th August — Ajoy Ghosh is on hunger strike since 16th August.

Bhagat Singh continues with his hunger strike and I find “that on account of weakness due to hunger strike on his part, he is not able to attend Court even if he was willing to do so. If he did attend the Court he would not be able to follow the proceedings.”

19th August — more or less same as above.

20th August — Ajoy Ghosh ceased hunger strike yesterday afternoon.

Another approver PW 441, Brahma Dutt turns hostile — He declined to answer most of the questions put by Public Prosecutor.

22nd August — (CW 10, Dr. Fazal-Ud-Din) I have examined Bhagat Singh and found that on account of forcible feeding he has so far recovered from weakness due to voluntary hunger strike and he can attend the Court if he would like to do and follow the proceedings intelligently. (CW 2) Bhagat Singh refused to come to the Court.

Order dated 26 August 1930 — In continuation of our orders of

3rd, 4th and 7th of July 1930, ...we order that the evidence of the witnesses whose names are given in the list below, which was duly recordedin the presence of the accused in Special Magistrate’s Court, be treated as evidence and brought on to this record.... (List of 93 PWs.)

“On the 26 August 1930, at which stage 457 witnesses had been examined, the prosecutor gave up his remaining witnesses and closed the case for the prosecution.

“The Tribunal then passed an order adjourning the case to following day in order that the accused persons might be questioned generally on the case in accordance with law before being called on for their defence. A copy of this letter was served on each of the accused persons in the jail on that day.²²

“On 27th August, the accused resisted production in the Court and their attendance was dispensed with until the following day. The Tribunal then recorded the following order:

“In view of their absence, we are unable to comply with the provisions of section 342 of Cr. P. C. by examining them generally the case.... We do not consider it necessary to take any further steps towards examining the accused under section 342 Cr. P. C. (now Section 313) as much as the order passed under section of 9 of the Ordinance dispensing with their attendance precludes such examination.”

“The Tribunal then passed a separate order under section 256 Cr. P. C. (now Section 233) calling upon all the accused to enter upon their defence and to produce their evidence and adjourning the case to the following day for the production of evidence. A copy of the order was served upon each of the accused persons in jail on that date.

“On 28 August 1930, the accused again resisted their production in the Court and their presence was dispensed with until the following date. No defence witnesses appeared on their behalf and no list was put in of any defence witnesses to be summoned on their behalf. The Tribunal adjourned the case to the following day.

“On the 29th August, the proceedings of 28th August were repeated, and also on 29th and 30th August, the accused failing to produce any witness in defence.

“On 1st September, all the accused resisted appearance in the Court and their presence was dispensed with till 15 September 1930.

“On this hearing, Mr. Amolak Ram Kapur appeared for two of the accused, namely B.K. Sinha and Ajoy Ghosh, made an oral

application before the Tribunal under the proviso to section 257 Cr. P. C. (now Section 211) for the recall for cross-examination of all the 457 PW's. The five approvers (PW 2 Jai Gopal, PW 3 P.N. Ghosh, PW 4 M.M. Banerji, PW 5 H.R. Vohra and PW 6 L.M. Mukherji) being in police custody were immediately offered for cross examination by Mr. Kapur. Regarding the remaining 452 witnesses, Mr. Kapur was asked to satisfy the Tribunal in accordance with the proviso to section 257 Cr. P. C. in respect of each individual witness that the recall of such witness was necessary in the interest of justice. Mr. Kapur had no defence witnesses with him and had brought no list of defence witnesses to be summoned in spite of the orders passed on 30th August and proceedings days.

"The first of the approvers, PW 2 Jai Gopal was then actually put on the witness box. But Mr. Kapur declined to cross-examine him and stated that he had no instructions to examine the approver. He asked for as an adjournment until 2 P.M. to enable him to interview his clients in the jail. This adjournment was granted at 11.45 A.M. He appeared at 2.00 P.M. and had brought an application signed on behalf of B.K. Sinha and A.K. Ghosh asking for one week's adjournment before beginning the cross-examine any of the prosecution witnesses.... The request was refused as dilatory and Mr. Kapur then withdrew from the Court.... Towards the close of the hearing of 1 September 1930, the Prosecutor was called upon to commence his arguments, which he concluded on 10.9.30. The case was then adjourned to the following day to enable the accused to attend and to advance before the Tribunal any arguments, which they might wish to advance on the case generally, and a copy of this order was served upon all the accused in the jail. On the 11th September, all the accused again resisted their production in the Court and an order was passed dispensing with their attendance until 8 October 1930, the day the judgement was pronounced."²³

In the meantime, Bhagat Singh's father, Sardar Kishan Singh, made a petition to the Tribunal on 20 September 1930 highlighting some legal infirmities in the trial. He had gone to the length of pleading an *alibi* for his son on the day of Saunders' murder on 17 December 1928. Bhagat Singh openly resented this move on his behalf, through his letter published in *The Tribune* dated 4 October 1930.

A chain reaction:

Simultaneous Bomb explosions (19 June 1930)

"The remaining members of the H.S.R.A. had rented houses in various cities of Punjab and on the morning of 10 June 1930, small decoy bombs were exploded by means of candle fuses. The police, who rushed to the spot, found a nest black box fitted with handles resting on the top of obviously revolutionary literature. The box was a powerful 'booby trap' bomb designed to explode when lifted. These traps were arranged at Lahore, Amritsar, Gujranwala, Sheikhpura, Lyallpur and Rawalpindi. At Gujranwala, a Head Constable was fatally injured and others were wounded and at Lyallpur, an officer sustained burns in his ears which resulted in his death two months later, while another lost sight of one eye. In the other four places the plan was miscarried.

"In November 1930, the trial of the Second Lahore Conspiracy Case opened. Four of the accused, after another lengthy trial, were sentenced to transportation for life, and eleven others to various terms of imprisonment. Yashpal, Has Raj 'Wireless' and Chandra Shekar Azad were among the absconders."²⁴

Attempted attack on the Punjab Governor at Convocation

"The Convocation of Punjab University concluded, and at 1.20 PM the academic procession led by the Governor (also chancellor of the University) started leaving the *pandal*. All of a sudden a young man Hari Kishan Talwar from Mardan, P.S. Waladher,



N.W.F.P., who was sitting in the visitors' gallery, stood up in his seat, and advanced towards his target brandishing a revolver. He fired two or three shots in quick succession from the left and jumped towards the main entrance firing another shot.

Brandishing his revolver at the time of his advance, Hari Kishan reached

a pillar near the porch. He was chased by a Police Sub Inspector and a few others and eventually over-powered. Sub Inspector Channan Singh (name sake of the policeman who was killed while chasing Bhagat Singh on 17.12.28) was fatally wounded.

“In his statement before the trial court he said: “As non-violent methods to win nation’s freedom were frustrated by repression and thousands of my countrymen and even women and children were jailed, beaten and insulted, his belief changed from non-violence to violence.” He was executed on 9 June 1931 at 6.00 A.M. in Mianwali jail.”²⁵

The Verdict: Particulars of Sentences awarded by the Tribunal

1. Sukh Dev : (U/s) 121 waging war + 302/109/120-B murder; Death
2. Kishori Lal: –do–; Life Imprisonment
3. Des Raj: X; Acquitted
4. Prem Dutt: u/s 121-A : Conspired to Wage War; 5 years
5. Jai Dev : u/s 121 waging war; Life Imprisonment
6. Shiv Verma: –do–; Life Imprisonment
7. Gaya Parshad: –do–; Life Imprisonment
8. Mahabir Singh: –do–; Life Imprisonment
9. Bhagat Singh: –do– + 302 murder; Death
10. Ajoy Ghosh : X; Acquitted
11. Jitendra Sanyal : X; Acquitted
12. BK Sinha : u/s 121 waging war; Life Imprisonment
13. Shivram Raj Guru: –do– + 302 murder; Death
14. Kundan Lal : u/s 121 Conspiracy to Wage War; 7 years
15. K.N. Tiwari : u/s 121 waging war; Life Imprisonment²⁶

Punishment For S. 121 and S. 302, the minimum sentences is Life Imprisonment and maximum is Capital Punishment. For S. 121-A, there is no minimum punishment and maximum is life Imprisonment.

S. 109: Abetment (assistance) in a crime, same as for the main offence.

S.120-B: criminal conspiracy – do –

The two sections 109, and 120-B when joined with section 302 render Sukh Dev guilty of murder of Saunders and Channan Singh despite his non-participation in the commitment of these crimes.

Of these two sections, which empower the prosecutors to hold non-participants in a crime, *in absentia*, to be as guilty as the actual

perpetrators. S. 109 is as old as the code but S. 120-B ‘Criminal Conspiracy’ was added in 1913, that is more than half a century later. This was not incidental; rather it was added in view of a series of actions by revolutionary groups, such as Alipur Conspiracy case (1908), Dhaka Conspiracy Case (1910), Satara Conspiracy Case (1910), Nasik Conspiracy Case (1910) and Delhi Conspiracy Case (1912).

Criminal Conspiracy — S. 120-B is invoked where two or three persons agree to do or cause to be done (1) an illegal act or (2) an act which is not illegal, by illegal means.

Section 120-B had since been often used to implicate anyone as an accused in a criminal case, when just one or two of them had actually participated in it. In the present case, its ‘usefulness’ to the prosecution is revealed in the heading of Chapter V of the judgment, “What is proved regarding the connection of individual incidents as the outcome of a single Conspiracy and by what evidence.”

Conspiracy implies secret plotting, for which there can be no direct proof since it is private in character. So there can only be indirect evidence, from fortuitous incidents such as the presence or absence of persons or articles at a place at a given time. This exercise is inherently conjectural. For instance, in the present case, the recovery of a list of books in the handwriting of Bhagat Singh from Saharanpur house during the raid on 13 May 1929, was enough to link him with whatever had happened there. Above all, this linked Saharanpur centre with the ‘main’ Conspiracy.

Thus each one of the accused can be held guilty for all the illegal acts preformed by any one of the accused in pursuance of the ‘conspiracy’ in this case since September 1928.

So once a conspiracy is there, all can be held guilty of each and every act of his co-accused being ‘co-conspirators’.

The misuse of this section (120-B) by police even in routine criminal cases, in exaggerating the number of culprits in a crime is quite common. This ‘misuse’ often ends up in acquittal of such ‘extra-load’ by the courts in almost all such cases.

But Tribunal was ‘special’ in character and not an ‘ordinary’ Court of law!

S. 121: Waging of War Against the King: S. 121-A: Conspiring to Wage War. While defining the crime, the illustrations provided make it applicable only to an insurrection or rebellion, not to simple-sporadic individual acts of violence which were cited against the accused

in this case.

Interestingly, the Special Tribunal of 1915 had taken care to justify its application of this Section to *Ghadrites*. It was so done despite the number of accused extending to a few hundreds, their attempts to loot armoury at Lahore Cantonment, large scale seduction of troops, besides their plan for simultaneous risings in important cities of India. Indeed, before leaving America for India in July 1914, they had actually proclaimed War against the King Emperor by "*Ailane-Jang*" — the Declaration of War. But even then that Court had thought it prudent to discuss the propriety of application of this drastic section in the case.

The present Tribunal felt no such compunction while doing so.

In the present case, 10 out of the (convicted) 12 accused are held guilty u/s 121 and the rest two, namely Prem Dutt and Kundan Lal u/s 121-B.²⁷

Here, an observation of Bhagwan Das Mahore may be cited:—

"For us a few comrades, armed with crude pistols and improvised ill-devised bombs, the idea of challenging the mighty empire would have been nothing less than a grand delusion. To be sure, none for us had even entertained such a grotesque notion and we were acutely conscious of the constraints under which we were operating and hence aimed at accomplishing only what was expedient and attainable."²⁸

According to the Tribunal: "That the activities of the revolutionary party formed in Delhi in September 1928, to which these accused persons belonged, amounted to the waging of war or the abetment of waging of war against the King Emperor is established by the following considerations:

- (A) The *name* — which the members gave to their party was "*Hindustan Socialist Republican Army* (sic)", and one of their leaders namely Pandit Ji was put in charge of a department. These considerations indicate the military character of the party at any rate according to the intentions of those who organized it.
- (B) Nature of the *books* recovered: There is further to be taken into consideration the nature of some of the books which are in possession of 'some of the members' of the party such as;
 - (1) Modern Breech Loader

- (2) Infantry Training
 - (3) The Sepoy officers' Manual
 - (4) Small Arms Training.
- (C) Nature of the bombs — which were used at Delhi and those which were found in Lahore and Saharanpur. These bombs are essentially weapons of offence only and intended to be used for the deliberate destruction of life. These are not weapons which are carried for self-defence. (How far 'bombs used at Delhi' were destructive of 'life' is on record relating to the case!)
 - (D) Next there is the evidence of P.N. Ghosh and Man Mohan Banerji regarding the *character of resolutions* passed at the Delhi meeting of September 1928 in favour of adoption of violence as a means to bring about revolution. (Factually speaking, Delhi meeting was totally silent on the question of strategy or 'means' to be adopted. This was in sharp contrast to H.R.A. who had openly affirmed their faith in armed revolution. At best, Delhi meeting adopted resolutions authorizing a few actions of an apparently violent nature but never favoured violence as a policy. Even Lord Irwin, the Viceroy of India had conceded that the Assembly Bomb Explosion was 'an attack' directed against no individual...." Making the meaning of 'Revolution' crystal clear Bhagat Singh has stated before the Court of trial in the case that "Revolution" does not necessarily involve sanguinary strife nor is there any place in it for individual vendetta. It is not the cult of the bomb and pistol. By "Revolution" we mean that the present order of things, which is based on manifest of injustice must change."
- On the top of it, even the Lahore High Court Judges had held Bhagat Singh to be a "sincere revolutionary!")
- (E) Lastly, there is the *character of the acts* which the members of the party subsequently perpetrated and specially the throwing of the bombs in the Assembly Hall at Delhi, the murder of a police officer at Lahore, the project to rescue a prisoner from custody and the establishment of factories for the manufacture of bombs.

These activities come within the terms of section 121 of the I.P.C."²⁹

Testimony of Approvers

As per law of evidence the testimony of a co-accused can be taken into account only in a case when, there exists, otherwise, a credible amount of evidence against the accused, merely as an additional proof.

There is sound common sense behind such a presumption since approver is, by definition, a traitor to his friends and comrades, out to save his skin by selling his conscience. He may be, and is, interested in securing conviction of his former friends to a maximum possible degree of punishment for his own safety.

That is why the 1915 Special Tribunal had, in para II, Law Points - "Testimony of Accomplices" had sought to meet the objections of the defence with regard to the admissibility of evidence rendered by some of the approvers.³⁰

In the present case, out of the 7 approvers, two, namely Ram Saran Das and Brahm Dutt retrieved their confessions. In fact the former proved the tutoring of approvers by the police.

Of the remaining five, Jai Gopal and H.R. Vohra being ordinary members were simply present in some meetings and took part in some incidents.

On Bhagat Singh (accused No. 11)

Bhagat Singh was arrested in the Assembly hall on 8 April 1929, by Sgt. Terry (PW 18) after he and B.K. Dutt had thrown a bomb in that building.

His ubiquity: The important feature of evidence regarding Bhagat Singh is his ubiquity. (Note: Among all the accused, none except him had been held as 'ubiquitous', exactly like Kartar Singh Sarabha, Bhagat Singh's role model. In the copy of Judgment of 1915 Tribunal, Bhagat Singh had underlined the relevant line about Sarabha in that document. (Courtesy: National Gallery of Portraits, Chandigarh.)

Bhagat Singh having been designated as one of the two coordinators (the other being B.K. Sinha) and was here, there and every where. In the Section dealing with Identification Parades (Magisterial Trial), besides eight witnesses of murder, five PWs each from Delhi and Lahore, three from Agra, three from Jhansi, three from Calcutta, four from Ferozepur, two from Betiah (Bihar) were able to identify him in identification parades. Indeed he had figured prominently in all the phases of the movement.

Saunders' murder: Bhagat Singh's participation in the Saunders' murder is the most serious and important fact proved against him and is fully established by ample evidence.

Evidence against Bhagat Singh is three fold in character:

- (a) Eye witnesses,
- (b) Two approvers namely Jai Gopal and H.R. Vohra and Gun Expert Mr. Churchil,
- (c) Posters issued/pasted after the murder.

Eye witnesses: The professed eye-witness of the murder are Abdulla (PW 34), Mohd. Ibrahim (PW 36), Faqir Sayed Wahid-ud-Din (PW 47), Ch. Habib Ullaha (PW 101), Kamal Din (PW 102), Ganda Singh (PW 80) and Mr. Fearn (PW 146). Mr. Fearn did not identify either of the assailants, and the evidence of Wahid-Ud-Din and Ganda Singh is disregarded owing to the fact that neither of these witnesses was prompt in giving information to the authorities about what was professed to have been seen. Although the evidence of Mohd. Ibrahim, Constable, Habib Ullaha and Kamal Din is not in itself unconvincing, there are certain discrepancies in the testimony of other witnesses too which give rise to some doubts whether these three men should be believed, as measure of precaution their evidence also is disregarded.

The evidence of Abdulla (34) is however, satisfactory and reliable. He was the motor driver whose motor arrived, while the firing was going on at the corner of the Court Street near to the position where Jai Gopal had taken up. He, afterwards, took the body of Mr. Saunders to the hospital in his car. He saw the attack upon Saunders and he had identified Bhagat Singh satisfactorily, both at a Magisterial parade and also in Court as the taller of the two men who fired upon Mr. Saunders. This identification, there is no reason to doubt.

"Then there were also witnesses who saw the assailants on their way from the scene of action passing through the D.A.V. College ground and leaving those grounds at the other end. Of these, Som Nath a student (P.W. 144), Aftab Mohd. a student of Government College, Lahore (P.W. 232) and Ata Mohd. cycle repairer (P.W. 48) provided good evidence of Bhagat Singh's participation in Saunders' murder.

Testimony of two approvers: Jai Gopal and H.R. Vohra, and corroborative evidence of Mr. Churchil the gun-expert who proved

that the empties recovered on 17th December at Lahore had in fact been fired from the automatic pistol (Exh. P. 480) recovered from Bhagat Singh in the Assembly on 8th April 1929.

“As it was recovered from Bhagat Singh nearly four months after the murder, it can not be said to amount to more than corroborative evidence of the statement of Jai Gopal, but as a corroborative evidence it has a very high value.

Poster issued / pasted after the murder — some of which have been proved to be in Bhagat Singh’s hand.

“Taking all the above evidence together, it is conclusively proved that Bhagat Singh took part in the murder of Mr. Saunders and actually fired at him with the pistol Ex. P. 480.

His escape from Lahore and visit to Calcutta to find a bomb expert in the person of J.N. Das, making of gun-cotton at Calcutta and bombs at Agra are proved against him. It was at Agra that the decision to throw a bomb in the Assembly Hall was made by the Central Committee leading to the Assembly Bomb explosion on 8 April 1928.

To sum up, Bhagat Singh was a leader of the revolutionary party which was formed at Delhi in September 1928, and had already taken part in revolutionary activities before that party was formed. He was an active member of the Punjab branch of which Sukh Dev was organizing member and from the time of the Delhi meeting Bhagat Singh was selected as a link between the various provinces and in this capacity was constantly travelling from place to place between Punjab and Calcutta. As a member of the Central Committee he also took part in important deliberations and plans of the party and was generally found participating in the active side of the movement. He took part in the operation to loot the Punjab National Bank in Lahore. He was a protagonist in the murder of Mr. Saunders and it was he, who had entered into negotiations that J.N. Das should teach bomb making to the members of the party. He actively took part in the bomb making at Agra, in the rescue party of Jogesh Chatterji, and in the journey to Jhansi to test a bomb and finally he was selected to throw a bomb in the Assembly Hall in April 1929.³¹

Despite all that the accused had actually done, in pursuance of their revolutionary goals, the real issue here, as highlighted by A.G. Noorani was the ‘fairness of the trial’.

“But the issue is in the fairness of the trial; the fairness of those who staged it — the police, the prosecution, the Magistrate and the three Judges of the Tribunal. This was the first case of its kind ever in which twelve persons were tried, convicted to death, transportation for life and long terms of imprisonment, for the gravest offences known to law, after a trial which was conducted in their absence.”³²

“Jinnah had accurately summed up the Government’s policy in his speech in the Central Assembly a year earlier: “We will pursue every possible course, every possible method, but we will see that you are sent either to the gallows or transported for life, and in the meantime we shall not treat you as decent men.”³³

POST SCRIPT: Lifers are sent to Andamans — Hats off to Punjab Police!

B.K. Sinha in his account of transportation to Andamans: ‘**In Andamans: the Indian Bastille**’ narrates.... It took three and a half days for the ship to reach Andamans from Madras. There were no events or incidents for us. We were lying in our block — everyone of us suffering from sea-sickness. It was our first sea-voyage. The police that escorted us were mostly people of Punjab. Some of them stood guard on us day and night. When they learnt that we were political prisoners and further that we were colleagues of the Martyr Sardar Bhagat Singh, they overwhelmed us with the warmth of their good wishes and care. They did not know — poor ordinary constables — how to express their deep sympathy. One of them an old bearded fellow would come and say, “Don’t be disturbed. Allah will soon get you liberated.” Other would come and smuggle in some part of his ship rations — a little sugar and tea. A third on duty would take someone of us out, and on the plea of bathing would allow us to move about for some time in the fresh air and outside our dark dungeons. All those little comforts and cares lavished on us by our people, we so gratefully acknowledge in our hearts....³⁴

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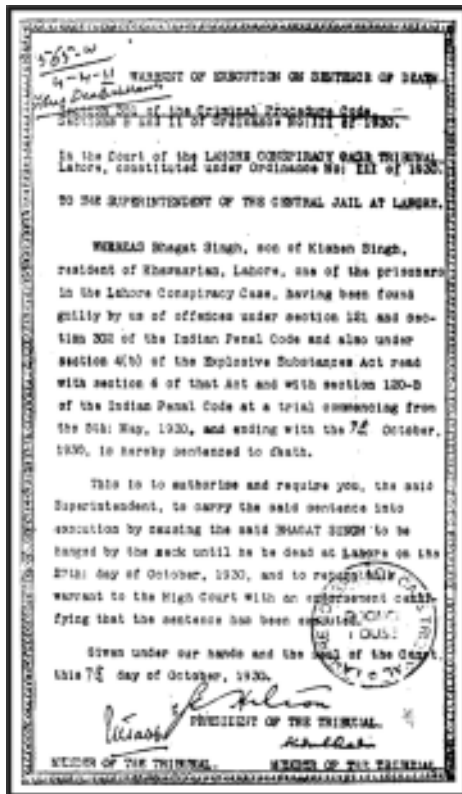
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15

THE COUNTDOWN

The death warrant of Bhagat Singh, issued by the Tribunal on 7 October 1930, to the Superintendent of Central Jail at Lahore, read:

“...This is to authorize and require you...to carry the said (death)



sentence, into execution by causing the said Bhagat Singh to be hanged by the neck until he be dead at Lahore, on the 27 day of October 1930, and to return the warrant to the High Court with an endorsement certifying that the sentence has been executed.”¹

The execution, however, was effected on 23 March 1931, the intervening period being very tumultuous.

Right since 8 April 1929, and throughout the trial and hunger strikes, Bhagat Singh, and his comrades had been the focus of sympathy and admiration of large sections of Indians throughout the country. The pronouncement

of the sentence of death upon three, young men in their early twenties, that too after a mock trial, shook the nation to its core.

The Government on its part also all this knew quite well, and it too apprehended that there was every likelihood of mass protests in

the form of public meetings, protest demonstrations, processions on the issue of their executions. Both, the Government of India and the Provincial Government of Punjab, therefore, started devising ‘fire fighting’ measures to contain this mass reaction. The Government of India was eager to know as to what steps the Punjab Government proposed to take in this regard. Hence, less than a fortnight after the pronouncement of the verdict, a demi-official letter was addressed to the Punjab Government on 20th October to “intimate the views on the question of the proposed prohibition of processions on the occasion of execution of the convicts of the Lahore Conspiracy Case.”

But so nervous was the Indian Government that without waiting for the reply from Punjab Government, it informed all the Provincial Governments throughout India vide their letter of 4 November 1930 that:—

“The present position in regard to Lahore Conspiracy Case is that an application has been made, on behalf of most of the persons convicted, for leave to appeal to the Privy Council (in England). There will, therefore, be delay of some weeks in the further proceedings. The Government of India has arranged with the Punjab Government to be informed in due course of the date of execution of the sentence if the proceedings before the Privy Council are unfavourable to the accused, and, in view of the probability of popular demonstrations being held, they will communicate the date of execution to the Provincial Governments.”²

Bhagat Singh's last dialogue with Comrades

This writer had often heard one of the comrades of Bhagat Singh, Pandit Kishori Lal, describing this final parting; “Whenever we left him, he would always part saying ‘phir milenge’ — ‘we shall meet again.’ On this occasion too, the same words were uttered by Bhagat Singh.”

December 1930

A night in Lahore Central Jail... in Condemned cells... Shiv Verma, Jai Dev and others have their last word with Bhagat Singh...

Shiv Verma: “On the day of judgement we were prepared for the capital punishment to be awarded to Bhagat Singh: Even then I felt dizzy on hearing the decision. The hitherto guess had become a

reality now. After the sentence we also were removed from the Borstal Jail and sent to Central Jail. Both the old and the new execution enclosures were adjacent to each other. Bhagat Singh, Sukh Dev and Raj Guru were in the new closure and we in the old one. One late evening the locks of our cells were opened and we were asked to move. The government intended to move us away before our companions were to be hanged.

“The Senior Superintendent of Jail along with his force marched towards the gate. After walking some distance he asked, “Will you meet your comrades?” After being thanked for his broadmindedness he got the gate of the new premises opened and took us to the cells of Bhagat Singh, Sukh Dev and Raj Guru.

“Despondency was writ large on the faces of all of us for the idea that we would be never meet these comrades again. After bidding the last *adieu*, when we began to return one of us (Jai Dev Kapoor) asked Bhagat Singh, ‘*Sardar*, you are going to die, I would like to know if you are sorry for it?’

“On hearing the question the *Sardar* laughed loudly first, then turned thoughtful and said, ‘When I set foot on the path of revolution I thought if I could spread the slogan of “*Inqalab Zindabad*” to every nook and corner of India by sacrificing my life I would think that I got the value of my life. Today when I am behind the iron bars of this cell I can hear the roaring sounds of that slogan rising from the throats of crores of my countrymen. I believe that this slogan will be hitting the imperialists hard as a driving force of the freedom struggle till the end.’ Then stopping a while he said with his innate smile, ‘What more price could there be of so short a life?’

“I was behind all of them. Tears came to my eyes while saying goodbye. On seeing me weeping he said, ‘Prabhat, it is no time to become sentimental. I shall soon be free of all the worries but all of you will have to traverse a long journey despite the heavy weight of responsibilities on you. You will not cower and will not stop halfway accepting defeat.’ Saying this he put forward his hand through the iron bars and caught hold on my hand.

“Coming near, the Jail Superintendent whispered, ‘March’. It was our last meeting with the *Sardar*....”³

Appeal to the Privy Council — Bhagat Singh, who had no illusions about the outcome of the trial, did not favour challenging its verdict of 7 October 1930. Being fully aware of this, some of the

members of defence committee like Lala Duni Chand and Dr. Gopichand Bhargava, who were keen to move Privy Council, were able to win over Bhagat Singh to their proposed move, by projecting it as politically advantageous as the postponement of the hangings shall accentuate the feelings of the people against the verdict. Two eminent lawyers Pran Nath Mehta, and Moti Lal Nehru too supported the move.

Acting wisely, the petition did not challenge the merits of the case proceedings as such and focused only on one point of law namely the legality of the Ordinance III of 1930.

The issue raised was that Section 72 of the Government of India Act, by virtue of which the Governor General of India had promulgated the Ordinance III on 1 May 1930, constituting a Special Tribunal with extra-ordinary powers, could be invoked only under the cases of “emergency, and for the peace and good governance of British India.”

It was urged by the petitioners “that before any ordinance can be held valid three things must happen, and at least two of those are of some importance to this petition.

“In the first place, there must be a state of emergency, whatever ‘emergency’ may mean; the second is that the Ordinance must be an ordinance following within the description that it is an ordinance for the peace and good governance of the British India, or some part thereof; and the third point is that it must, in addition to being for peace and good governance, fall within the restrictions of the legislative powers of the Indian legislatures...”⁴

Referring to the justification of the Ordinance contained in the opening ‘statement’ it was contended that the ‘Emergency’ purportedly arose out of the requirement that 24 accused in the Lahore Conspiracy Case be deprived of the safeguards available to an ordinary accused, by creating a Special Tribunal with extra-ordinary powers, and by denying to them even any right to appeal, so very basic tenet of any legal system merely in anticipation of protracted trial proceedings.

Expectedly, the petition was dismissed, on technical grounds; that it was the Governor General who was the sole judge to decide where there existed a state of emergency or not!

It took long for the petition to be decided, and it was dismissed on 12 February 1931, and detailed Judgment was delivered on 27th February.

The Reaction — The news of the imminent execution of the trio sent shock waves throughout the country. As a result ‘Bhagat Singh

Appeal Committees' were formed all over Punjab. The object aim of these committees was to obtain signatures of as many people as possible, on a memorandum to be submitted to the Viceroy praying for commutation of the death sentence to one of transportation for life. This appeal was worded as under:

"We the undersigned request that the death sentences passed by the Special Tribunal at Lahore on Bhagat Singh, Sukh Dev and Raj Guru be commuted on the following among other grounds:-

- 1) That the trial was not held according to the ordinary law of land before an ordinary court of law.
- 2) That the trial was conducted *ex-parte* in the absence of the accused by an extraordinary court of law.
- 3) That the accused were not permitted an appeal to the high court.
- 4) That when Kishan Singh, father of Bhagat Singh requested to be permitted to produce documentary and oral evidence to disprove the prosecution story regarding the murder of Mr. Saunders, the request was not granted.

"That at a time, when death sentence is going to be abolished in England and a similar Bill is pending before the Legislative Assembly and again the relations between India and Britain are being adjusted on a more equitable and just basis, the execution of these young men would produce very painful effect on the minds of the people."

It was decided that on 17 February 1931, this memorandum will be submitted to the Viceroy and 'Bhagat Singh Day' should be observed throughout the Province.⁵

Official view: "**Revolutionary activities of the 'Bhagat Singh Appeal Committee'**: "Bhagat Singh Appeal Committees have now been reported from the following places...." (Sixteen cities of Punjab are listed.)

"The object of these committees is to stir the people to such a pitch of excitement that on the date of execution, they will take part in offensive and possibly violent demonstrations.

"In Lahore and Amritsar, the Committees consist of old members of *Naujwan Bharat Sabha*.... Their propaganda at present is to obtain the signatures of as many people as possible to the memorial to the

Viceroy asking for the commutation of the death sentence of Lahore Conspiracy Case prisoners to one of the transportation for life."

[Note: The Tribune of 28 Feb. 1931, reported that by then one lakh signatures had been obtained.]

"This provides an opportunity for demonstrations and speeches so that the public attention is focused on the matter and the excitement and sympathy was aroused.

"'Bhagat Singh Day' was observed on Feb. 17th. In Lahore there was only partial *hartal* in the morning amongst the shop keepers. All the colleges were affected.... A procession took place in the afternoon, largely attended by students, at which amongst other objectionable cries, the following were shouted in chorus: "*Demolish this old Government*" "*We will not rest till we have shot all the high officials*". This was followed by a meeting attended by 15,000 persons. S. Sardul Singh, Dr. Satyapal and Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna were the important speakers. The two released Congress leaders (S. Sardul Singh and Dr. Satyapal) who are expected to voice the opinion of the Congress, also threw themselves whole-heartedly on the side of violent revolution by the extravagant praise they lavished on these murderers whom they described as 'martyrs', 'heroes' and 'immortal young men'.... They concluded by saying that if Bhagat Singh were executed, there would be no chance of peace in the future. Immediately after this, when the excitement of the audience had reached its highest pitch, appeals were made to sign the printed forms.

"There seems to be no doubt that even the mildest supporters of the Congress have been carried away by the enthusiasm of the extremists. Indeed if the All India Congress Working Committee does not demand the commutation of these sentences as one of the terms of opening negotiation with the Government, they will be most unpopular with the extremist wing.... **Just as at the time of Congress of 1929, the threats of violence goaded the whole party to extremism (sic) so now threats are compelling the Congress leaders to take up the case of Bhagat Singh.**"⁶

Measures mooted

The Punjab Government in reply to a letter on the subject from the Government of India replied as under :

"(2) The Governor-in-Council has considered the question and

proposes to instruct all District Magistrates in Punjab at least a week in advance of the occasion (execution) as follows:

- (a) That all processions in sympathy with the Conspiracy Case convicts are to be barred.
 - (b) That if in any district no procession is likely, the Deputy Commissioner need issue no order.
 - (c) If on the other hand, he has reasons to expect any procession, he should issue an order under section 144 Cr. P. C. about 24 hours in advance.
 - (d) The form of this order should be to prohibit for a week all such processions except such as Superintendent of Police is prepared to license under section 30 of the Police Act.
- (3) It would be difficult to enforce the prohibition of meetings, especially at Amritsar and Lahore, without a series of clashes with the police, and the Governor-in-Council, therefore considers it undesirable to prohibit the holding of meetings, but the makers of bad (sic) speeches at such meetings will be prosecuted without delay."

The Government of India, on its part conveyed to all Local-Provincial Governments throughout India that... '...since it appears desirable that a uniform policy should be pursued, the Government of India suggests for the consideration of Local Governments and Administration that similar arrangements be made elsewhere, subject to such variations as may be desirable having regard to local conditions and practices. e.g. The Government of India does not desire to suggest that meetings in sympathy with the convicts should be allowed where it is the present policy to forbid public meetings.'

Notwithstanding the indifference of Bhagat Singh, Raj Guru and Sukh Dev to their impending execution, there was no let up in the endless efforts of eminent public leaders like Madan Mohan Malviya and the teams of patriotic lawyers for securing reprieve for them.

On 14th February Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya sent a telegram to the Viceroy from Allahabad requesting him to commute the death sentence of these young men to that of transportation for life. The telegram read:—

"...May I appeal to your Excellency to exercise your prerogative of mercy in cases of Bhagat Singh, Raj Guru and Sukh Dev to commute sentences of death passed upon them into those of transportation for life. I do so not only because I am opposed on grounds of humanity to infliction of death sentences upon a fellow man but also because the execution of these young men whose action was prompted not by any personal or selfish consideration but by a patriotic impulse, however misguided, will give a great shock to public feelings in the country. While the purpose of law and State will be fully met by a sentence of transportation of life, such an act of mercy on your Excellency's part will, at this juncture, produce a very beneficial effect on Indian public opinion."⁶

In the courts: Efforts were made by some public spirited lawyers to get the execution deferred. Four advocates of Lahore, namely, Sham Lal, A.R. Kapoor, Amar Nath Mehta and Pran Nath sent the following telegram to the Viceroy on 16.2.31. "Bhagat Singh, Raj Guru and Sukh Dev are important witnesses for the accused in the New Lahore Conspiracy Case, because it is alleged by the prosecution that the accused were members of the revolutionary party of which the person above named were leading members; that the bomb action on the Viceregal rail was done in consultation with Bhagat Singh; that the jail action was also meant for their rescue and in consultation with them and on all these points and other matters the persons above named can throw much light. The accused apprehend that before they are in position to produce them as defence witnesses, they might be executed under sentences passed by the first Tribunal. It is, therefore, prayed that the execution of sentences may be stayed till they have been produced as defence witnesses in the case. If they are executed, the accused shall be deprived of very important defence evidence."

On the same day, 16th February, they moved an application before the Tribunal appointed under Act IV of 1930. It was prayed that Bhagat Singh, Raj Guru and Sukh Dev can prove witnesses of such a valuable character in the case "it may be recommended to the authorities that their execution may be stayed in the interest of the defence."

The same day an order was passed by the Tribunal asking the defence Council to "put in full particulars by tomorrow morning as to the material evidence which it desired to elicit for the persons named."

Death warrant outdated?

Messers Jiwan Lal, Baljit Singh and Sham Lal also sent a telegram to Viceroy on 16th February challenging the validity of the death warrant, since the Court/Tribunal which had issued it, had ceased to exist after completing its term of 6 months on 31 October 1930.

Detailed application: As a follow up of application by Messrs Sham Lal, A.R. Kapoor, Amar Nath Mehta and Pran Nath Advocates before the new Tribunal, a detailed application was filed on 17th February containing details of the evidence in the case before them regarding Bhagat Singh, Raj Guru and Sukh Dev to clarify the facts alleged concerning their roles.

The application was rejected on same very day for want of jurisdiction in the matter.⁷

Habeas Corpus Petition Rejected — Immediately after the said rejection of application for relief, the same group of lawyers moved a writ petition before the High Court which was dismissed on 25 February by Justice Bhide stating that:—

“The only ground on which the custody in which the prisoners are detained is said to be illegal is that there is no authority which can issue a fresh warrant for the execution for the death sentence. The learned Advocate General for the Government contended that the Punjab Government which had the power to suspend the execution of the death sentence had also the power to direct the execution of the sentence by removing the bar; that there was no necessity for a fresh warrant at all and it was not even the practice to issue a fresh warrant. The Council for the petitioners, on the other hand, contended that the original warrant expired on 27 October 1930 and a fresh warrant was necessary and in this connection reference was made to section 391, 389 and 400 Cr.P.C. Accepting the stand of the Government, the petition was dismissed.”⁸

By now the detailed order of Privy Council rejecting the petition challenging the legality of the Ordinance III had been passed.

As a last resort, a notice was served on Secretary of State on 26 February 1931 through the Collector of Lahore district. The notice made it clear that the petitioners intended to sue the Secretary of State for a declaration that the death sentences are incapable of

execution, seeking a perpetual injunction to restrain Government from ordering the execution.

Notice under Section 80 of C.P.C. highlighted the legal steps taken till date, to prevent the execution and the illegality inherent in the stand of the Government, which was “illegal, wrongful, unwarranted and tortuous and a civil suit to restrain the same was necessary and competent.” It was affirmed that in the absence of a favourable response to the notice, ‘we have instructions to institute a suit of the nature mentioned above.’

‘It is further requested “that you will be good enough to see that the sentence of death is not carried out until the expiry of the statutory period of two months prescribed by Section 80 C.P.C. which is a condition precedent to the institution of a suit against Secretary of State for India or a public officer in respect of any act purporting to be done by such public officer in his official capacity. It is quite apparent that the execution of the death sentence before the remedy provided by law has been availed of, will cause a loss of life as can in no manner be compensated for by damages or otherwise. Let us assure you in the end that we are prepared to render every possible assistance to you towards the solution of any legal point involved in the case, as the question is of far reaching importance.”

While forwarding this note to H. W. Emerson, Secretary, Home, Government of India, Mr. Ogilvi, Chief Secretary, Punjab commented, “It appears that it is the duty of the Local Government to direct that the execution must be carried out in accordance with law.”

He drew his conclusion from twin legal postulates: First: that an injunction can not be granted to interfere with the “public duties” of any department of the Local Government, second: the alternative remedy which the petitioner have adopted moving the High Court for a writ of *Habeas Corpus* under section 491 Cr. P. C. has failed.⁹

On this very day Bhagat Singh sent the following letter to the Governor of Punjab:

To

The Punjab Governor

Sir,

With due respect we beg to bring to your kind notice the following:

That we were sentenced to death on 7th October 1930 by a British Court, L.C.C. Tribunal, constituted under the Sp.

Lahore Conspiracy Case Ordinance, promulgated by the H.E. the Viceroy, the head of the British Government of India, and that the main charge against us was that of having waged war against H.M. King George, the King of England.

The above-mentioned finding of the Court pre-supposed two things:

Firstly, that there exists a state of war between the British Nation and the Indian Nation and, secondly, that we had actually participated in that war and were, therefore, war prisoners.

The second pre-supposition seems to be a little bit flattering, but nevertheless it is too tempting to resist the desire of acquiescing in it.

As regards the first, we are constrained to go into some detail. Apparently there seems to be no such war as the phrase indicates. Nevertheless, please allow us to accept the validity of the pre-supposition taking it at its face value. But in order to be correctly understood we must explain it further. **Let us declare that the state of war does exist and shall exist till so long as the Indian toiling masses and the natural resources are being exploited by a handful of parasites. They may be purely British Capitalist or mixed British and Indian or even purely Indian.** They may be carrying on their insidious exploitation through mixed or even a purely Indian bureaucratic apparatus. All these things make no difference. **No matter, if your Government tries and succeeds in winning over the leaders of the upper strata of the Indian society through petty concessions and compromises and thereby cause a temporary demoralization in the main body of forces. No matter, if once again the vanguard of Indian movement, the Revolutionary party, finds itself deserted in the thick of the war.** No matter if the leaders to whom personally we are much indebted for the sympathy and feelings they expressed for us, but nevertheless we can not overlook the fact that they did become so callous as to ignore and not to make a mention in the peace negotiation of even the homeless, friendless and penniless of female workers who are alleged to be belonging to the vanguard and whom the leaders consider

to be enemies of their non-violent cult which has already become a thing of the past; the heroines who had ungrudgingly sacrificed or offered for sacrifice their husbands, brothers, and all that were nearest and dearest to them, including themselves, whom your government has declared to be outlaws. No matter, if your agents stoop so low as to fabricate baseless calumnies against their spotless characters to damage their and their party's reputation.

The war shall continue.

It may assume different shapes at different times. It may become now open, now hidden, now purely agitational, now fierce life and death struggle. The choice of the course, whether bloody or comparatively peaceful, which it should adopt rests with you. Choose whichever you like. But that war shall be incessantly waged without taking into consideration the petty (illegible) and the meaningless ethical ideologies. **It shall be waged ever with new vigour, greater audacity and unflinching determination till the Socialist Republic is established and the present social order is completely replaced by a new social order, based on social prosperity and thus every sort of exploitation is put an end to and the humanity is ushered into the era of genuine and permanent peace.** In the very near future the final battle shall be fought and final settlement arrived at.

The days of capitalist and imperialist exploitation are numbered. **The war neither began with us nor is it going to end with our lives. It is the inevitable consequence of historical events and the existing environments.** Our humble sacrifices shall be only a link in the chain that has very accurately been beautified by the unparalleled sacrifice of Mr. Das and most tragic but noblest sacrifice of Comrade Bhagwati Charan and the glorious death of our dear warrior Azad.

As to the question of our fates, please allow us to say that when you have decided to put us to death, you will certainly do it. You have got the power in your hands and the power is the greatest justification in this world. We know that the maxim "Might is right" serves as your guiding motto. The whole of our trial is just a proof of that. We wanted to point out that **according to the verdict of your court we had waged war**

and were therefore war prisoners. And we claim to be treated as such, i.e. we claim to be shot dead instead of to be hanged. It rests with you to prove that you really meant what your court has said.

We request and hope that you will very kindly order the military department to send its detachment to perform our execution.

Yours,
Raj Guru, Sukh Dev and Bhagat Singh¹⁰

(Emphasis added: Ed.)

A fatal blow:

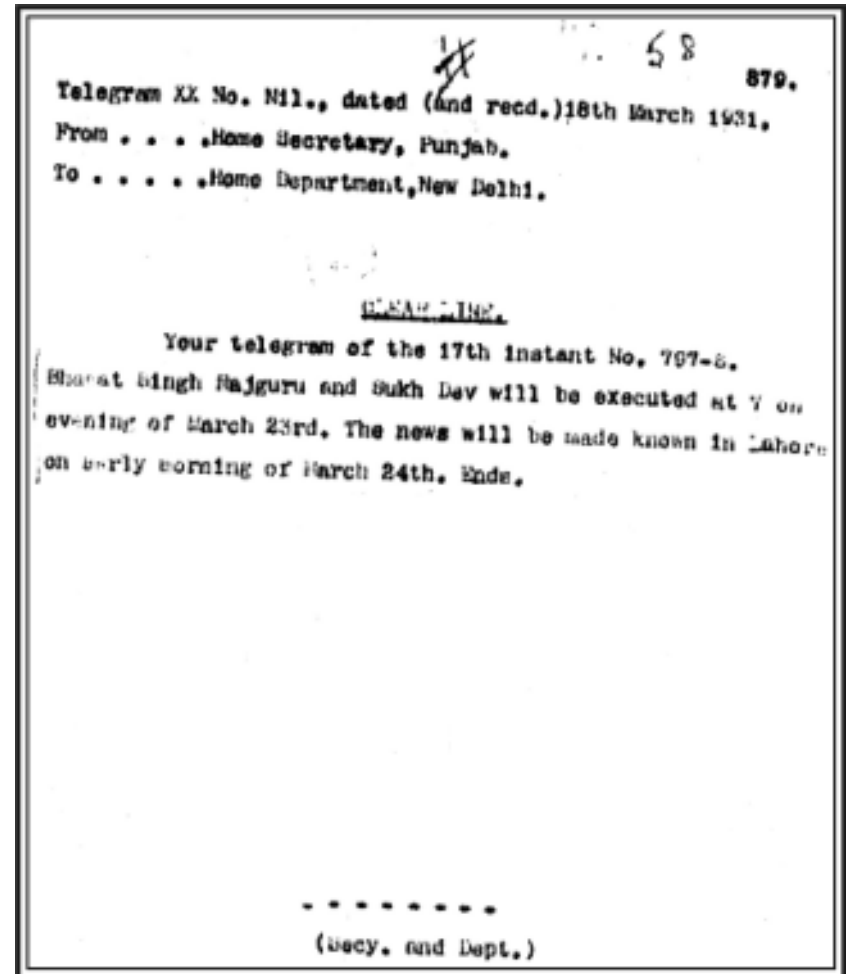
Martyrdom of Chandra Shekhar Azad

“An important event took place in Allahabad on the morning of 27 February 1931. The police received information that the notorious (sic) absconder Chandra Shekhar Azad was in the Alfred Park. Mr. Noth-Bower, Superintendent of Police on special Duty joined Thakur Bisheshwar Singh in the park and approached Azad and his companion, who were sitting under a tree. Azad and his companion drew revolvers and began firing; whereupon a revolver duel took place at short range between Azad and Mr. Nott Bower, both of whom were wounded before they took shelter behind trees. Azad’s companion had run away. Thakur Bisheshwar Singh tried to outflank Azad, and fired at him, probably wounding him in the head, but he himself received a bullet in his lower jaw. Azad fell back dead.”¹¹

Note: This report has correctly mentioned that the injury on the right temple of Azad was the result of police bullet contrary to the popular notion that Azad had fired his last bullet himself on his right temple. This is corroborated by a summary of Post Mortem Report published in ‘The Leader’ of 2 March 1931.)¹²

Events move faster: The events started moving fast. The Central and Punjab Governments after frantic exchanges of coded telegrams finally clinched the date on 17 March — 23 March 7 P.M. “The news will be

made known in Lahore on early morning of March 24.¹³



Follow up: A telegram from Delhi to all Local Governments, other than Punjab, dated 22nd March read:—

Execution fixed to take place tomorrow Monday evening. Applications have been filed in the High Court which will be heard tomorrow. If judgement is reserved, Local Government have decided to postpone execution. If applications are dismissed, arrangements hold good, and news of execution will not be known until Tuesday morning.

2. We will let you know definitely as soon as we have information.

In the meantime precautionary measures should not be taken until local conditions so required.

Telegram Delhi to London, 23 March 1931: Executions have been fixed for this evening. In the meantime their friends have filed last minute application in High Court at Lahore.

2. There has been considerable agitation especially by Youth Associations and extreme left of Congress and there is undoubtedly a strong feeling in these quarters. So far there have been no clashes between the police and the sympathizers and the excitement has not been so high or so extensive as we apprehended. Days immediately following the execution are, however, more likely to see trouble.

In High Court: On March 21, Rai Bahadur Badri Nath asked the High Court for leave to appeal to the Privy Council against Justice Bhide's orders of 25th February. On the same day he moved another *habeas corpus* petition on behalf of Bhagat Singh's brother Kultar Singh on the ground that Justice Bhide had only mentioned the possibility of commutation of the sentences. But he "did not dispose of the question as to the execution of the death warrants." The petitioner apprehended that the three condemned prisoners would be executed on 23rd March as the last interview allowed to their relatives was fixed at 11 A.M. on that day.

Both petitions, one for leave to appeal to Privy Council and another of *habeas corpus* came up for hearing and once again before Justice Bhide on that fateful day, March 23. He said that he would not hear the *habeas corpus* petition as he had already expressed his opinion on a similar petition. Since Badri Das said that it was that petition that he wished to argue first, it was transferred to some other Judge. The petition for special leave to the Privy Council was kept pending.

The legal remembrancer S.L. Sale pointedly told the High Court that he had instructions from the Government to see that both the petitions were disposed of that very day.

The *habeas corpus* petition came up for hearing before a Division Bench comprising Justice Sir Alan Broadway and Justice Johnson.

Badri Das recalled the facts: Death sentences on October 7; date of execution fixed for 27 October, and demise of the Tribunal by whom the sentences were imposed: 31 October.

Justice Broadway: Who stayed the execution?

Counsel: Government of Punjab.

In the course of arguments, R.B. Badri Nath emphasized that the sole question to be decided was whether it was the judicial or the executive authority that was competent to issue the warrant.... As per Section 389 Cr. P.C.... it should be issued by the Special Tribunal which passed the death sentences.

The petitioners did not petition for mercy because they considered their case was strong.

Justice Broadway: Did the petitioner put in a petition for mercy?

Noad (Prosecutor): The petitioner did not themselves put in petition for mercy. They, however, put in another petition to the Governor saying that they should be shot instead of being hanged.

R.B. Badri Das: This is another kind of mercy.

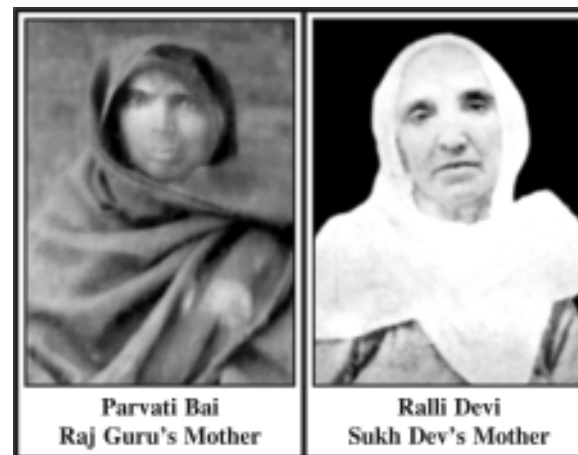
"R.B. Badri Das submitted in conclusion that the prisoners should be set at liberty.

"The Division Bench pronounced orders at 3 P.M. on 23rd March dismissing the petition."

"On the same day Justice Bhide dismissed the other petition for special leave to appeal to Privy Council. It was argued by Jiwan Lal Kapoor, who later became a Judge of Supreme Court."¹⁴

Last family meeting boycotted

The families of all the three martyrs reached the gate of Central Jail Lahore, 23rd morning for their last meetings. The Jail officials did



not allow the grandfather of Bhagat Singh and his *Chachis* a meeting, being second and third degree relatives. As a protest Bhagat Singh's family boycotted the last meeting. On learning about this, Rajguru's mother Parvati Bai, who had come all the

way from Poona for the purpose, and also Ralli Devi, Sukhdev's mother too refused to meet their sons....

As for Bhagat Singh, the previous meeting with his family on 3.3.1931 thus proved to be the 'last meeting'. During all these meetings, including the last one, his relatives, especially the ladies, as usual entered the jail with tears in their eyes, but came out seldom without Bhagat Singh having made them laugh a few times. **His 'last' dinner:** Bogha, who used to clean his jail toilet, was addressed fondly as '*Bebe*' by Bhagat Singh...as being his surrogate 'mother';...since, felt Bhagat Singh, it was Bogha only who had done this for him since his mother did for him in childhood.

As per Jail custom, the Jailor asked Bhagat Singh the morning about his last meal. 'I want to eat food prepared by *Bebe*' replied he. 'I will send a man to your home' said the jailor. Prompt came Bhagat Singh's reply, "No, my *Bebe* is here in jail itself." "How? Where?" Exclaimed the Jailor; whereupon Bhagat Singh unfolded the story.

Bogha was soon called to the death cells. He could not comprehend what for he was being called.

This episode had been portrayed in a play in Punjabi by noted playwright Davinder Daman, titled "*Chhipan Ton Pehlan*" — (Before the dusk)

Bogha: ...I have been honoured to see you each and everyday. Being poor, I am lacking in means.... Yet, if I could be of any service to you?...

Bhagat Singh: Yes, if you agree.

Bogha: Come out with it. ...Would it be within my reach I must.

Bhagat Singh: Bring me meal cooked by you.

Bogha: (Puzzled, a long stare at Bhagat Singh, ...picks up his broom and the basket...moves up to the door... Stops — again looks back at Bhagat Singh) When I come for duty in the evening, I shall bring it along. (Leaves wiping his tears)...

Bogha was sure to fulfil the last wish of his 'Sardar' in the evening of 23rd March; he had taken this for granted, since the hanging invariably takes place in the morning, in this case 24th morning.

When he came to the death cells, his Sardar had gone... for ever... ever... ever.¹⁵

The finale:

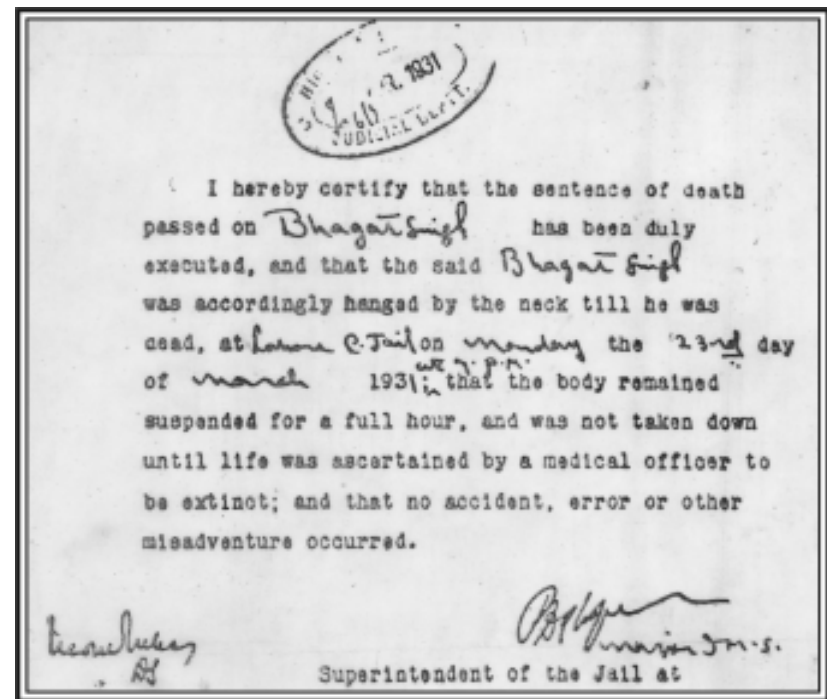
The jail authorities had already ordered the locking in of all the prisoners earlier than the schedule, since 7 P.M. was the execution

time. It did not take long for them to read the message. Soon after the shouting of 'Inqilab Zindabad' 'Down with Imperialism' were heard from the side of the 'condemned cells' barracks. Almost all the prisoners started shouting the same slogans. The sound was so loud as to be heard outside the jail too: Shock waves went all around.

The authorities, in order to pre-empt public demonstrations had already decided to disclose execution news only on 24th morning.

Clandestinely, dead bodies were then cut into pieces, packed in sacks loaded in trucks and secretly transported from the backside of the jail, to the bank of Satluj to Hussainiwala near Ferozepur and cremated there. But crowd followed soon after. While the perpetrators of the foul deed escaped, people were able to retrieve some of the mortal remains of the martyrs — part of which is still preserved in Bhagat Singh Memorial Museum at his ancestral village.

On 24th March evening, a huge funeral procession accompanied these remains, parts of which were cremated on the banks of Ravi.



Over 40,000 bareheaded men, and 5,000 women in black robes, formed the funeral procession — younger section constantly shouting

‘Inqilab Zindabad’, ‘Bhagat Singh Zindabad’, ‘Raj Guru Zindabad’, ‘Sukh Dev Zindabad’.¹⁶

And thence began countdown of the British Rule in India, just sixteen years hence.

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- 2 *The Hanging of Bhagat Singh: Complete Judgement and Other Documents*, Vol. I, Malwinder Jit Singh Waraich, Dr. Gurdev Singh Sidhu, pp. 222-223.
- 3 *Reminiscences of Fellow Revolutionaries* by Shiv Verma, translated and edited by Malwinder Jit Singh Waraich, Madhvi Kataria Dhaumya, Unistar Books Pvt. Ltd., Chandigarh (2013), pp. 39-40.
- 4 A. G. Noorani: *Trial of Bhagat Singh — Politics of Justice*, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2005, pp. 191-193.
- 5 *Naujawan Bharat Sabha and Hindustan Socialist Republican Association/Army (H.S.R.A.): Comrade Ram Chandra*, Ed. Malwinder Jit Singh Waraich, Unistar Books Pvt. Ltd., Chandigarh (2007), pp. 126-127.
- 6 *File No. 1215/4-20/1931*, National Archives, New Delhi.
- 7 Malwinder Jit Singh Waraich, Dr. Gurdev Singh Sidhu, *op. cit.*, pp. 222-226
- 8 ‘*The Tribune*’ (27.2.1931)
- 9 Malwinder Jit Singh Waraich, Dr. Gurdev Singh Sidhu, *op. cit.*, pp. 224-225.
- 10 *Ibid.* — letter from 3 martyrs to Punjab Governor, pp. 236-238.
- 11 *Terrorism in India (1917-1936)*, compiled by Intelligence Bureau, Home Department, Government of India. Manager Government of India Press, Simla. 1937. (Manuscript), pp. 109-110.
- 12 National Gallery of Portraits, Chandigarh.
- 13 *File No. 1216-4/21/1931*, National Archives, New Delhi.
- 14 A. G. Noorani, *op. cit.*, pp. 225-227.
- 15 *Chhipan ton Pehlan* (Play in Punjabi). ‘Before the dusk’ by Devinder Daman, Chetna Parkashan, Ludhiana, 2006.
- 16 *Naujawan Bharat Sabha and Hindustan Socialist Republican Association/Army (H.S.R.A.): Comrade Ram Chandra*, *op. cit.*, p. 144.