

“The Nature of Nationalism in Punjab Ghadr (1857) to Ghadr (1914)”

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The Ghadr Movement was launched in Canada-USA during the early decades of the 20th Century by emigrant Indians, mostly Punjabi Sikhs settled on the western coasts of Canada-America. This movement blazed a legendary trail of a ‘do or die’ crusade for complete independence from alien rule by means of a 1857 like Ghadr by people and the army in unison at the most suitable juncture. This led to the formation of Hindi Association of Pacific Coast in California during April 1913, with a formal constitution, but actually it started gathering real momentum from 1st November 1913 onwards with the publication of its mouthpiece ‘Ghadr’ weekly in Punjabi from its newly established headquarters in San Francisco, called ‘Yugantar Ashram’, the suffix denoting ‘New Era’ the title of a radical Bengali publication: The paper was published in thousands and distributed most widely without price.

As for ‘nature’ of Punjab Nationalism, the very name of the party office signified its out reach to the most-widely awake region of India, which was reinforced by adoption of ‘Bande Matram’ as the party salutation, invariably displayed on right and left corners of each issue of ‘Ghadr’. This by itself signified its moorings, since this slogan was derived from ‘Anand Math’, a fictional account of 18th Century ‘Sanyasi’ revolt against Muslim Nawabs.

The title of the paper ‘Ghadr’ was purposely chosen because the epithet was employed by the alien rulers to demonise the rebels, and the ‘Neo-Ghadrates’ went all out to wear it (so to say) on their sleeves purposely with the object of causing jitters to the powers that be. In one of its earliest issues (30th December 1913 to be precise) a poem was published whose opening stanza read:—

*Sari khalq khudae bedaar baithi,
Suta jagda tun Hindustan kiyon nahin.
[God’s people are wide awake all over,
Why don’t you bestir O! India.]*

A tricoloured ‘national’ flag too was prepared representing three major religious entities in India, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, with two crossed swords in the middle signifying its faith in arms rather than talks.

From Frustration To Ailan-e-jang

The Indian settlers in American continent had to face troubles, travails besides humiliation during their stay abroad: Their predicament is best conveyed in two lines of Punjabi in free verse echoed by all of them:

*“Des Pain Dhakke, Bahar Mile Dhoi Naa
Sada Pardesian Da Des Koi Naa”
(Humiliated back home, no solace abroad,
For us aliens no refuge around).*

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This desperate moaning and self-pity literally through a metamorphosis, is transformed into a clarion call for 'War':

"Challo challiye desh nun yudh karan,

Eho bachan te farman ho gae"

(Let us go to our country to fight,

This is our ultimate compact and command).

Their preparations too were nation wide. Also they roped in Rash Bihari a Bengali revolutionist to lead the party to fill up the vacuum created by its top leadership.
