

Ghadar Was A Reality...



Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna.

“Bangkok began receiving large numbers of Ghadarwallah,” Azharudin wrote. “For example, in August 1915, 12 revolutionaries arrived from America, some of them were labelled ‘most dangerous to the Indian Government.’ They were starting to organise a force of between 600 to 700 Indians and hoped to recruit many more in Siam for the purpose of creating a rebellion in India.”



Barakatullah Bhopali.



Sohan Singh Bhakna, second from the right, was arrested and jailed for his role in the Ghadar Party's abortive revolt against British rule in India.



Anjali Sharma
Senior Journalist &
Wildlife Enthusiast

The Ghadar Movement of 1913-18 was one of the early but ultimately unsuccessful attempts of a group of Indians to overthrow the British Raj. What makes this movement particularly outstanding among Indian freedom struggles was its extensive ‘transnational/transregional’ terrain of operation. This movement was initiated by several intellectual expatriate Indians in the Pacific West Coast and joined by thousands of overseas Indians, living in multiple diasporas around the Indo-Pacific region. San Francisco, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Manila, Singapore, and some parts of Thailand, British Malaya, Burma, and Sri Lanka were among the major sites where their networks and activities existed. During the First World War (WWI), these Indians turned themselves into armed revolutionaries, setting up armed revolts in India and neighbouring regions. Like many other cases of Indian extremists, who did not conform to Gandhi's non-violent methods, the story of the Ghadar has received fairly little attention in the mainstream history of modern India.



The Independent Hindustan, a periodical published by the Ghadar Party. Credit: Wikimedia Commons (Public Domain).

Nine months after Britain entered the First World War, its vast intelligence network received inputs of the possibility of mass mutinies by Indian servicemen. According to these intercepts, Germany and the Ghadar Party had hatched an insidious plot whereby armed revolutionaries would enter India from Siam (now Thailand), and encourage Indian army personnel to revolt and seize power from the colonial authorities. Several members of the Ghadar Party had already arrived in Siam, British intelligence was warned. The next step in their plan was to sneak into Burma, which was then a province of British India. Alarmed by these reports, the British conducted a caste and ethnicity-wise headcount of non-European personnel in the Burma Military Police. It turned out that the force had a total of 15,864 Indian officers and soldiers armed with Martini-Henry rifles. Of these, 3,942 were Sikhs, 2,644 were Punjabi Muslims and 1,212 were so-called Hindustani Mohammedans. The military authorities probed if there was any discontent among these groups.



The cover of a collection of Ghadarite poems published in 1913. Credit: Wikimedia Commons (Public Domain).

“Ghadar was a corruption,” say the British

Cleveland felt this “corruption” had reached the Indian Muslim personnel in the 5th Light Infantry in Singapore as well. He sounded a word of caution. “One can easily understand the joy and confidence with which our enemies’ agents in Siam would work at a scheme for raising trouble in Burma,” he said, adding that while there was no cause for immediate anxiety in Burma, the British Minister in Siam needed to take action against Indian revolutionaries there. Siam, and its capital, in particular, were seen as a trouble spot for the British, whose main worry at the time, was the war in Europe. “I had some talk today with Brigadier General Haughton, who has just returned from Singapore,” Alfred Hamilton Grant, a civil servant, wrote in a note to Cleveland. “He says that, from information which he received in Singapore, he has reason to believe that Bangkok is a hotbed of Indian sedition, and is fast becoming the headquarters of the revolutionary movement in the Far East.”

The great majority of the Sikhs in the Far East, not in the army have been very badly corrupted by the doctrines of the Ghadar Party, and the sporadic instances, that we have seen of similar corruption among Sikhs of the Indian Army in India, are certainly not conducive to over confidence.”

ular, were seen as a trouble spot for the British, whose main worry at the time, was the war in Europe. “I had some talk today with Brigadier General Haughton, who has just returned from Singapore,” Alfred Hamilton Grant, a civil servant, wrote in a note to Cleveland. “He says that, from information which he received in Singapore, he has reason to believe that Bangkok is a hotbed of Indian sedition, and is fast becoming the headquarters of the revolutionary movement in the Far East.”

The great majority of the Sikhs in the Far East, not in the army have been very badly corrupted by the doctrines of the Ghadar Party, and the sporadic instances, that we have seen of similar corruption among Sikhs of the Indian Army in India, are certainly not conducive to over confidence.”

#FORGOTTEN HISTORY



Smuggling Arms was another concern

Another concern for the British was that members of the Ghadar Party, which was formed by Indians in the United States and the Far East had set up a camp near Raheng in the Thai province of Tak. “Attempts are being made at

passing pamphlets of a very seditious nature into Burma and at Myawadi, one parcel has been seized,” the General Commanding officer of the Burma Division wrote in a note to the Chief of Staff in Shimla.

Ghadar was a threat

When the First World War broke out, Siam, which hosted a sizable community of expatriates from Britain, France, Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, chose to stay neutral. At the same time, though, both King Rama VI, who studied law and history at Oxford, and Foreign Minister, Devawongse Varoprakar, were positively disposed towards the British. It was not hard to see the goodwill between the nations. British officers were helping modernise the Siamese civil services as well as the police. In 1915, the Commissioner of the Siamese Police was a Briton by the name of E. W. Trotter, who had previously served as an inspector in Burma.

The British authorities in India told Trotter to keep an eye on the activities of ‘disaffected Indians’ in Siam and gave him a grant of 500 teicals (about Rs. 580) for the job. They were, however, still not sure of the extent of danger that the Ghadar revolutionaries in Bangkok posed to the colonial regime in India. David Petrie, a policeman, was



Komaganta Maru- The Voyage of the Damned.

asked to assess the situation. He had lived in India for 26 years and later became the Director-General of the spy agency, MI5, was sent to Bangkok. In 1915, it took 14 days to reach the Thai capital from Calcutta by steam-er as the ship would go via Singapore and halt in the city for three days.

“According to my idea, Mr. Petrie’s mission is to pick up information as to the Indian situation in the F.M.S. (Federated Malay States), Siam and Dutch Indies, which the Government of India is frequently called on, to diagnose and advice upon, to see the

local British officials and help them in any way possible with Indian information, and in particular to see what can be done about the request made by our Minister at Bangkok for a secret agent to keep him informed of local Indian plots,” Cleveland wrote in a note. Petrie was also told to approach the Singapore authorities and ask them to temporarily detain the Ghadar members, who were to be deported from Bangkok. The British wanted to question the revolutionaries within their territorial jurisdiction before repatriating them to Calcutta.

Indian Independence Day

On Indian Independence Day, the streets come alive with the vibrant colours of its flag, saffron, white, and green. This day marks the culmination of a long struggle for nation's independence from British rule. The journey was not easy and was filled with sacrifices, resilience, and indomitable spirit. The real momentum in the fight against the British happened in the early 1900s century, under leadership of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. The ultimate success of these efforts came at midnight on 15th August 1947, with India declared independent of their British rulers.



The Main Leaders

The two main leaders of the Bangkok plot to launch a revolution from Burma were Darisi Chenchaiha and Sukumar Chatterji. The duo had met as students at the University of Berkeley in the US, where both of them were members of the Nalanda Club. From Cleveland's notes, it is obvious that the British were monitoring the activities of Chenchaiha for over a year. “Attended the dinner given at 1936, Bonita Avenue, Berkeley, on 16th January 1914, under the auspices of the Yungantar Ashram in honour of Ram Chandra Peshawari taking over the editorial responsibilities of the Ghadar newspaper, and also at the meeting convened by the Hindustan Association on 21st February 1914, at which Tarak Nath Das gave a seditious lecture entitled ‘The Regeneration of India,’” he wrote.

Apart from Chenchaiha and Chatterji, another important Ghadar leader who arrived from the US was Jodh Singh. Living under the alias Hassan Zade and by cutting his hair, he was able to prevent the British from gathering any credible information about him. They could not even know that he was a Sikh. Three other men from China joined the revolutionaries in Siam, with the backing of German businessmen in Shanghai, Shib Dayal, Balwant Singh and Thakur Singh.

After being briefed by David Petrie, Commissioner Trotter began to put immense pressure on the Bangkok police. In August 1915, five of the leading Indian revolutionaries were arrested. One of them went by the name of S. D. Kapoor but the British believed that it was Dayal. The others were Thakur Singh, Zade, Chenchaiha and Chatterji.

“I venture to think that our officials at Bangkok have done a most excellent piece of work in procuring the arrest of these dangerous revolutionaries, and, probably, the Foreign Department will say something to this effect in answering their telegrams,” Cleveland wrote in a note. “We shall be very glad to receive all these arrested Indians under custody from Siam via Singapore.”

The men were tried and sentenced in India. Not much is known about most of them after they served their sentence. The government website, commemorating 75 years of Indian independence, makes a brief mention of Chenchaiha. It says that he spent eight out of his 36 years in public life in prison and that he was a well-known writer. After these arrests, the British Legation in Siam asked the local authorities to intercept issues of the Ghadar newspaper that found its way to Bangkok via other Asian ports. British agents continued to try and dismantle the Ghadar network in other parts of Siam, such as in Chiang Mai, relying on intelligence.



The headquarters of the Ghadar party.

The Bangkok Operations

A tough task awaited the British in Bangkok. “The establishment of Ghadar branches in Siam was divided into three geographical sections,” Azharudin Mohamed Dalil wrote in a 2002 paper titled, *The Ghadar Movement in Southeast Asia, 1914-18*. The movement's main centres were Chiang Mai in the north, Phuket in the south and Bangkok, “which acted as the focal point.” In 1915, Bangkok was an ideal place for an Indian revolutionary. “There were no restrictions to enter or live in Siam, and because of this policy, members of several Indian communities had set up shop in the country. In this melting pot, an Indian revolutionary, coming in from the US, could easily blend into his community, making it difficult for British officers to track him despite the control that they exercised over the local police. “Bangkok began receiving large numbers of Ghadarwallah,” Azharudin wrote. “For example, in

August 1915, 12 revolutionaries arrived from America, some of them were labelled ‘most dangerous to the Indian Government.’ They were starting to organise a force of between 600 to 700 Indians and hoped to recruit many more in Siam for the purpose of creating a rebellion in India.” Indian businessmen in Bangkok were more than happy to help the revolutionaries in whatever way they could. The British knew this too.

“The Bangkok branch provided all the necessary information to the Ghadarwallah who arrived in Siam,” Azharudin wrote. “Indar Singh provided food, Nihal Singh provided accommodation, and Gopal Das and Surti were responsible for the transportation of provisions to a jungle plantation near Muang Sing on the Siam-Burma frontier, where the Ghadarwallah were to have established themselves before continuing their journey.”

#TRENDING

Independence Day 2024: Wishes, inspiring messages & quotes

This day is a momentous occasion to honour the sacrifices of those who fought for India's independence

India's Independence Day, observed annually on August 15th, marks the day in 1947, when the country gained freedom from British rule. This day is a momentous occasion to honour the sacrifices of those who fought for India's independence, reflecting on the progress made since then, and contemplating the nation's future. Independence Day is celebrated with great enthusiasm across India, featuring parades, cultural performances, and decorations in the national colours of saffron, white, and green. Public buildings, schools, and homes are adorned with flags, flowers, and balloons, while communities come together to enjoy patriotic songs, traditional foods, and various events that highlight India's rich heritage.



always fly high and inspire us. Have a great Independence Day!”

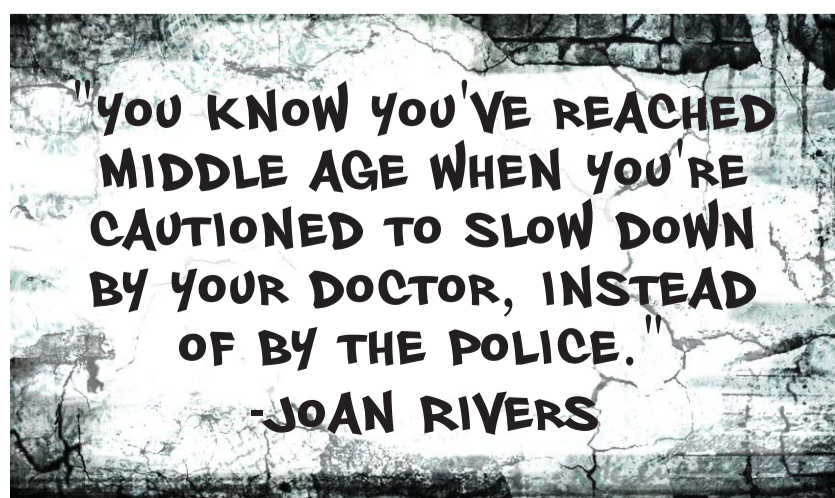
- “Happy Independence Day! May the spirit of freedom fill your heart with joy and pride.”
- “Celebrating our freedom and the heroes who made it possible. Wishing you a Happy 15th August!”
- “Here’s to a day of reflection and celebration of our nation’s freedom and achievements.”
- “May our independence always be a source of joy and unity. Happy Independence Day!”
- “Let’s celebrate the courage of our forefathers and the freedom we enjoy today. Happy 15th August!”
- “Wishing you a joyful Independence Day filled with pride and happiness for our great nation!”
- “May the spirit of freedom bring you joy and success today and always. Happy Independence Day!”
- “On this special day, let’s remember our heroes and celebrate the freedom they fought for.”
- “Happy 15th August! May our country always thrive with peace and prosperity!”
- “Here’s to celebrating our nation’s independence and the freedom we cherish. Have a wonderful day!”
- “May this Independence Day bring you joy and remind you of the strength and unity of our nation.”
- “Wishing you a day filled with celebration and pride in our beautiful country. Happy Independence Day!”
- “Let’s honour the sacrifices made for our freedom and enjoy the blessings of independence.”
- “May the flag of our nation

for our freedom and a chance to appreciate the liberty that we enjoy today.”

- “Let’s come together to celebrate our nation’s achievements and work towards a brighter and more inclusive future.”
- “May the spirit of Independence Day inspire us to strive for peace, justice, and unity in our country.”
- “On this day of freedom, let’s reflect on our progress and set our sights on a future of growth and harmony.”
- “Independence Day is a time to celebrate our country’s resilience and to commit ourselves to its continued success.”
- “Inspiritual quotes by renowned leaders also hold a special place in the hearts of many. Here are some memorable quotes!”
- “Forget not that the grossest crime is to compromise with injustice and wrong. Remember the eternal law: you must give if you want to get.”
- **Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose** “Let new India arise out of peasants’ cottage, grasping the plough, out of huts, cobbler and sweeper.”
- **Swami Vivekananda** “Freedom is never dear at any price. It is the breath of life. What would a man not pay for living?”
- **Mahatma Gandhi** “A country’s greatness lies in its undying ideals of love and sacrifice that inspire the mothers of the race.”
- **Sarojini Naidu** “The shots that hit me are the last nails to the coffin of British rule in India.”
- **Lala Lajpat Rai** “It is easy to kill individuals, but you cannot kill the ideas. Great empires crumbled, while the ideas survived.”
- **Baghat Singh** “You give me blood and I will give you independence.”
- **Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose** “We have believed, and we do believe now that freedom is indivisible, that peace is indivisible, that economic prosperity is indivisible.”
- **Indira Gandhi** “Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country.”
- **Jawaharlal Nehru** Independence Day is a day of celebration, reflection, and commitment to the nation’s ideals and future. It is a day that reminds us of the sacrifices made for freedom and the unity and strength that define India.



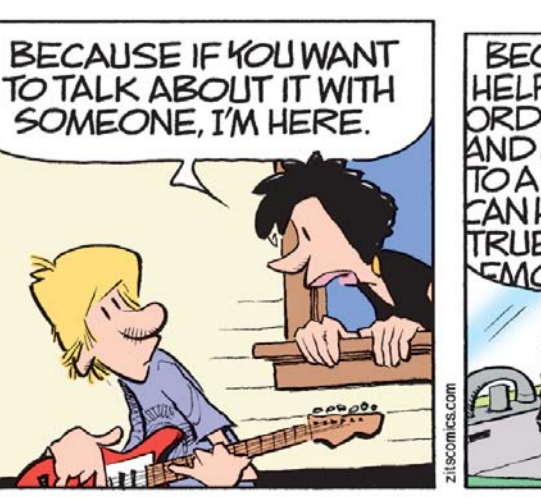
THE WALL



BABY BLUES



ZITS



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman