Revolutionary Pasts

Communist Internationalism in Colonial India

Ali Raza

Revolutionary Pasts

In this engaging and innovative history of the communist movement in colonial India, Ali Raza reveals the lives, geographies, and anti-colonial struggles of Indian revolutionaries and how they sought to remake the world. Driven by the utopian visions of Communist Internationalism, Indian revolutionaries yearned and struggled for a global upheaval that would overthrow European imperialisms and radically transform India and the world. In an age marked by political turmoil, intellectual ferment, collapsing empires, and global conflicts, Indian revolutionaries stood alongside countless others in the colonized world and beyond in their desire to usher in a future liberated from colonialism and capitalism. Drawing from a wealth of archival materials, Raza demonstrates how Communist Internationalism was a crucial project in the struggle for national liberation and inaugurates a new approach to the global history of communism and decolonization.

ALI RAZA is Associate Professor of History at the Lahore University of Management Sciences.

Revolutionary Pasts

Communist Internationalism in Colonial India

Ali Raza

Lahore University of Management Sciences

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India

79 Anson Road, #06–04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108481847
DOI: 10.1017/9781108693875

First published 2020

Printed in the United Kingdom by TJ International Ltd, Padstow Cornwall

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-108-48184-7 Hardback

In memory of Jauhar Hussain

Contents

Figures

Acknowledgements

I am not sure when I first started thinking about this book. It could be the moment when I stumbled across a police intelligence file when I was still a DPhil student. The file was a day-to-day report on the activities of a solitary revolutionary on the run. It all made for rather incredulous reading. He had been on the run for years on end. He was wanted by the British Empire, violently opposed by his political detractors, and (presumably) hated by his family for his frequent disappearances. Nothing, it seemed, was going his way. And yet – if the report was correct in its assessment – he fervently believed that he was on the road to eventual victory. What on earth did he see? What was he driven by? How could mere dreams be this powerful?

Though I didn't recognize it then, I may have asked those questions on other occasions too, especially in the company of those who had dedicated their lives to chasing elusive dreams. On one occasion, seventeen of us were standing with rude placards outside the election commission protesting the rigged 2007 re-election of then Pakistani dictator, President Pervez Musharraf. Soon enough, the police swooped in and took twelve of us to the nearby police station (I was too out of shape to make a run for it with the five who got away). Luckily, nothing of any consequence happened. We were let go after two days, four trumped-up charges, and a few bruises. But we were lucky. Thousands had to endure far worse. None of that was unusual in a time of military rule, of course, but what struck me was how these erstwhile revolutionaries – many of whom I had never met before – were all too accustomed to this world. Jail seemed a homecoming to many of them. They were all fairly aged and they had spent their lives in one or another form of leftist activism. Most had cut their political teeth in the heady days of the 1960s when the world seemed to be on the cusp of transformation. Since then, they had grown accustomed to state persecution, long jail sentences, and to one defeat after another. Still, the dream remained alive for them.

What was this dream? What did it mean for those who grew in its shadow? To those who were shaped by it? What was this past that was

never acknowledged in the textbooks I read, a past that remained alive only through the stories comrades told one another? How did this memory survive the brutal onslaught of an actively hostile 'post'-colonial state? What did this past offer to us in our discontented present? I suspect these questions stayed with me even when I wasn't fully aware I was pursuing them.

For those reasons, I can't be sure how long this book has been in the making. What I am certain of, however, is that I have accumulated far too many personal and intellectual debts than I can possibly acknowledge or recount here. Since my undergraduate days, I have been lucky to have incredible teachers and mentors. In my time at Oxford, where the building blocks of this book were laid, I was trained by a cohort of remarkable scholars, all unfailingly generous with their time and insights. To them all, Professors Faisal Devji, Polly O'Hanlon, the late Jan-Georg Deutsch, Jeevan Deol, John Darwin, and others, I owe a debt of gratitude. I am also grateful to those who made Oxford home. I can't imagine what those years would have been like without Youshey, Moizza, Ayesha, and Ammara. But more than anyone else, it was the unwavering generosity and kindness of Professor Judith Brown that saw me through my DPhil training and research. Her mentorship, care, ethics, and commitment to history are lessons I have never quite forgotten. This book represents my enduring gratitude to her.

Nor would this book have been possible without the many conversations, discussions, and random musings with friends and colleagues around the world. In Berlin, where I worked at the Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO), my work was shaped by the support and intellectual camaraderie of colleagues and visiting scholars. In particular, I would like to mention Heike Liebau, Katrin Bromber, Paolo Gaibazzi, Sanaa Alimia, Ali Nobil Ahmad, Nils Riecken, Ravi Ahuja, Jennifer Jenkins, Nitin Sinha, Aanandita Bajpai, and Samuli Schielke. Nor would my Berlin sojourn have been complete without the friendship, laughter, and good cheer provided by Omar Kasmani, Bani Abidi, Nusrat Sheikh and Sarnath Banerjee.

Elsewhere, I have been fortunate to have friends, colleagues, and mentors who have been a source of endless encouragement, excellent feedback, and intellectual companionship. I am especially thankful to Mana Kia, Durba Mitra, Anupama Rao, Javed Majeed, Yamin Saikia, Yasmin Khan, Chad Haines, Santanu Das, Gajendra Singh, David Gilmartin, Ayesha Jalal, Irfan Habib, Ian Talbot, Harish Puri, Dhruv Raina, Ammar Jan, Ali Jan, Chris Moffat, Daniel Elam, Zaib Aziz, Kama Maclean, Kasim Tirmizi, Tahir Kamran, Su Lin Lewis, Gerard McCann, Rachel Leow, Anne-Isabelle Richard, and Asad Farooq. I also

benefited immensely from the feedback I received from the National History Center's fabulous decolonization seminar. Some of the work I presented there made its way into *Itinerario* and *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, and from there, to this book. More importantly, I doubt if any of this would have been possible without Franziska Roy, Benjamin Zachariah, Carolien Stolte, Michele Louro, and Maia Ramnath, with whom I worked on our volume, *The Internationalist Moment: South Asia, Worlds, and World Views 1917–39* (2014). We may have gone our separate ways since then, but our initial ideas and conversations were crucial in helping me sharpen my research questions and interests. Franziska, in particular, has been more than just a colleague. She has been my rock. I don't know what this work would have looked like had it not been for her willingness to listen to my rambling ideas and read through my drafts. Finally, I am deeply indebted to my colleague, friend, and mentor, Manan Ahmed. His counsel, ideas, wisdom, and encouragement have helped me time and again. Amongst other things, he helped me see the value of this project at a time when I was low in confidence and plagued by self-doubt. For that, and more, I shall forever be grateful.

A special word for poet, translator, writer, historian, comrade, and *murshid*, Amarjit Chandan. I vividly remember the time he called me out of the blue when I was still a student at Oxford. He had heard on the grapevine about a young upstart from Pakistan working on the communist movement in South Asia. His earlier email having gone unnoticed (which I am still embarrassed about), he wrote again asking for my phone number. He called within a minute of my reply. What followed that hour-long phone call was a series of memorable conversations that taught me as much about this history as any book or scattered archive would have. Talking to this former Naxalite and son of a Ghadar revolutionary, reminded me of why these histories matter. It is from Ustad Chandan and the care and love he put into painstakingly collecting and stitching together photographs, biographies, scattered reminiscences, poetry, and archival documents on Ghadar and the Punjab communist movement, that I learnt the worth and the enduring resonance of this history. Simply put, this book would not have been possible without our conversations. Nor would it have been possible without the endless material he so generously shared with me. Since mere words aren't quite sufficient to convey my gratitude to him, I present this book as a tribute to his lifelong labour of love for the Left. I hope it matches up to the high standard he has set for me.

Closer to home, at the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), where I've spent some of my most intellectually stimulating

and productive years, I've been blessed with friends and colleagues who have supported me along the way. My time at LUMS would have been truly impoverished without the warm and supportive presence of Kamran Asdar Ali, Ali Khan, Hasan Karrar, Spenta Kakalia, Tara, Bahar, Emad Ansari, Bilal Tanweer, Nida Kirmani, Ali Usman Qasmi, Maryam Wasif, Nousheen Zaidi, Waqar Zaidi, Nadhra Shahbaz, Umair Javed, Sanval Nasim, Anum Malkani, Anushay Malik, Hasan Javid, Taimur Shahid, Aurangzeb Hanif, and Amber Riaz. I am especially grateful to Bilal, Emad, Maryam, Ali Qasmi, Amna Chaudhary, and Noor Shahzad for reading and commenting on portions of the manuscript. And last, but not least, a special word for my students – you know who you are – without whom these conversations would have been incomplete. It is they who continually remind me why history matters. They have made reading, writing, and teaching history worthwhile, and I am indebted to them all for the interest, commitment, and joy they bring to the classroom.

My research was enabled by the work of the exemplary professionals working at the British Library, International Institute of Social History (IISH), Library of Congress, US National Archives, Chicago University Archives, Zentrum Moderner Orient, Auswärtiges Amt, School of Oriental and African Studies, Indian Institute (Oxford), Centre for South Asian Studies (Cambridge), and the Modern Records Centre (Warwick). In Pakistan, my work would not have been possible without the staff of the Punjab Archives, Sindh Archives, National Archives, National Institute of Historical & Cultural Research, and most especially, the National Documentation Center. I was also fortunate to have friends, from Chicago and Washington DC to London and Islamabad, who graciously hosted me while I went about my archival work. In DC, Miriam and Will provided me with a room and good company. Chicago provided excellent camaraderie, friendship, ideas, and conversations through Atiya and Sunit Singh. In London, Goshi, Dost, Raza, Milli, and both Naveeds, welcomed me with unmatched generosity, along with much-needed hilarity and entertainment. Similarly, my three months in Islamabad would not have been possible without the generosity and graciousness of my friends, teachers, and hosts, Aasim Sajjad Akhtar (my first *ustad*), Asha Amirali, and of course, the then year-old Rumi.

Moreover, my archival work would have been incomplete (it still is in many ways) without the assistance and kindness of colleagues who sent me documents archived across the Radcliffe Line. As historians of South Asia from South Asia, we are forced to contend with partitioned histories and partitioned archives. With all my attempts in getting a research visa to India ending in ignominious failure, I was reliant on the kindness of

friends and colleagues – Franziska Roy, Sunit Singh, Michele Louro, Carolien Stolte, and Amarjit Chandan, among others – who not only shared their archival treasures but also photographed the specific files I requested of them. I am not sure what to call this exchange except that this would surely qualify as a novel form of cross-border smuggling. Sadly, this is all too common for Pakistani and Indian historians. And whilst we wait endlessly for visa regimes to become more tolerant – a prospect that seems increasingly unlikely – I can only hope that historians continue to work, collaborate, and share resources across these borders. At stake is nothing less than a fuller reckoning of our shared pasts. Few things, after all, are as awkward for nationalist storytelling as a reminder of messy, fluid, and shared pasts.

This note of acknowledgement would be incomplete without thanking my editor Lucy Rhymer. She was interested in this project when I only had a vague idea about it. Three years after our initial correspondence, she responded immediately to my query asking if she was still interested in the book. I am grateful for her patience, considerateness, and guidance during this entire process. I am also thankful to Lisa Carter and Emily Sharp for helping me along the way, and of course, to the generous reviewers who helped me refine my argument.

In closing, this book is dedicated to Amma and Abba. While I couldn't be the *real* doctor they had hoped for, their unconditional love and support has made all this possible. I can't ask for anything more than to see them hold this book in their hands. Similarly, Sono, Yasir, Aamna, and Kabir have been a source of joy, support, and an ever-present reminder of home in all the years I spent living out of a suitcase. Finally, all expressions of gratitude are inadequate when it comes to Zahra. Her love, support, and encouragement saw me through some very difficult days. This book bears the invisible marks of her comforting presence. May we continue growing together in the years to come.

Abbreviations

AICC	All India Congress Committee
AIKC	All India Kisan Committee
AIL	Anti Imperialist League
AIML	All India Muslim League
AISF	All India Students Federation
BIC	Berlin India Committee
CAIP	Communist Activities in India and Pakistan
CID	Criminal Intelligence Department
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPI (M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CPI (ML)	Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)
CPP	Communist Party of Pakistan
CPUSA	Communist Party of the United States of America
CSP	Congress Socialist Party
DIB	Director of Intelligence Bureau
ECCI	Executive Committee of the Communist International
HRA	Hindustan Republican Association
HSRA	Hindustan Socialist Republican Army
IB	Intelligence Bureau
INC	Indian National Congress
IOR	Indian Office Records, British Library
KKP/KKS	Kirti Kisan Party/Kirti Kisan Sabha
LAI	League Against Imperialism
LOC	Library of Congress
MCC	Meerut Conspiracy Case
NAI	National Archives of India
NDC	National Documentation Center
NIHCR	National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research
NJBS	Naujawan Bharat Sabha
PCP	Pakistan Communist Party
PKC	Punjab Kisan Committee

PPSAI	Punjab Police Secret Abstracts of Intelligence
PWA	Progressive Writers Association
RILU	Red International of Labor Unions (Profintern)
RPAP	Report on the Police Administration in the Punjab
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
SA Dal	Shiromani Akali Dal (Akali Party/Akali Sabha)
SGPC	Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee
USSR	Union of Socialist Soviet Republics
WPPSAI	West Punjab Police Secret Abstracts of Intelligence

1 Revolutionary Pasts

> To articulate what is past does not mean to recognize 'how it really was'. It means to take control of a memory, as it flashes in a moment of danger.[1]
>
> Walter Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*

Working on a maize farm deep in the Argentinian heartland in the year 1929, Naina Singh Dhoot was taken aback by an unexpected visit from Rattan Singh, a communist, roving revolutionary, and leader of the Ghadar Party. Prior to his visit, Rattan Singh had already toured Europe, the United States, Canada, and Panama for the party, which had initially been founded by Indian immigrants in North America in 1913 with the single-minded purpose of freeing India from British rule. In the 1920s, the party established links with the Communist International, which enabled it to send its cadres and recruits to Moscow for political and military training. As part of its mission of recruiting new cadres, the party sent its emissaries to Indian diasporas across the world, from North and South America to East Africa and South East Asia. This was how Naina Singh met Rattan Singh, the party's emissary extraordinaire.

Born and raised in the village of Dhoot Kalan, Punjab, Naina Singh had migrated to Singapore in 1927 in search of work. It was in Singapore that he first learnt the poetry of revolution. There, he heard of a collection of poems by Punjabi labourers and farmworkers in North America. The *Ghadar di Gunj* (Reverberations of Rebellion) lamented the chains of imperialist slavery that bound India and Indians. But its poems also sang of revolution, freedom, and a new world to come, a world that was within their grasp. For Naina Singh and his friends, it was almost as if a 'new spirit had been injected into them'.[2] In Argentina, his next destination in search of work, Naina Singh was equally spellbound by what he heard from Rattan Singh, who appeared as a 'divine messenger' from another

[1] Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History' (1940), www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm.

[2] Naina Singh Dhoot, *The Political Memoirs of an Indian Revolutionary*, trans. Surinder Singh (Manohar Publishers, 2005), p. 89.

world. Other emissaries of the Ghadar soon followed in his footsteps. They too spoke of the tyranny of British rule. Already chastened by their experiences of racism and exploitation in foreign countries and moved by Ghadar's stirring call for action, Naina Singh and his fellow Punjabi workers set up a party cell in the city of Rosario. He offered his name to the list of cadres who swore to sacrifice their *tan*, *man*, and *dhan* (body, soul, and wealth) for the party. Others promised to sacrifice one, some two of the three.[3] Shortly after making their pledge, Naina Singh and his comrades left Argentina for the Soviet Union.

Their journeys to, and sojourn in, the Soviet Union indelibly changed their lives. They formed a nucleus of Indian revolutionaries who travelled via the Soviet Union to bolster the growing communist movement in India. In doing so, they were among countless others who made their way to Moscow, the undisputed centre of the communist world. For revolutionaries from the colonized world and beyond, the Soviet Union stood as a symbol of world revolution, as the patron in chief of national liberation struggles, and a site where a new age, a new future, a new world, were being inaugurated. Whether their paths physically passed through Moscow or not, the ideals of Communist Internationalism the Soviet Union ostensibly stood for remained profoundly inspiring and liberating for millions of men and women looking to reclaim their future. At stake for them was nothing less than the radical transformation and rebirth of a degraded and tarnished world. How this global project unfolded in colonial India with all its twists and turns is the story of this book.

The other central concern of this book is the utopian impulse that enabled and sustained this politics. What did it mean to live in utopian times? What, indeed, made those journeys possible? By any measure. Naina Singh's decision to leave for Moscow with eight of his comrades was a daring course of action. They had reached Argentina in search of work. Simply getting there had been onerous enough. But they were willing to give it all up in pursuit of a dream. Few had any illusions about what this might mean for them. They knew the risks in leaving for the Soviet Union. Not only was the way to Moscow fraught with dangers, it also meant a life on the run from an unforgiving British Empire.

And yet they were irresistibly drawn to this life. It was no coincidence that Naina Singh spoke of a 'new spirit' and a 'divine' message. This was an appropriate description of the utopianism of his times. How do we understand this sensibility, especially in our present times, which are

[3] Ibid., pp. 96–100.

marked by an entrenched suspicion of idealism and utopianism? Today, utopias and utopian visions appear as relics of a bygone age. Not so long ago, though, they were the hallmark of a rapidly transforming and tumultuous 'short' twentieth century.[4] This was, after all, the century of internationalisms, all of which sought to link geographically dispersed movements through global projects that would transform the world.[5] Together, they were sustained by certain expectations of the future. In this, Naina Singh Dhoot, along with countless others, was very much a part of his times. This book, then, is centrally concerned with excavating what Reinhart Koselleck called the 'horizon of expectation'.[6] And it is within this horizon that I seek to situate the politics of Communist Internationalism in India.

What made Naina Singh's world so rich with possibilities? That this was a world marked by political tumult, intellectual ferment, collapsing empires, global conflict, transnational solidarities, revolutionary change, and much else does not bear repeating at length. Other studies have shown this in a more comprehensive way than I could hope to emulate here.[7] For my purposes, it is sufficient to note that the subjects of this book found themselves in a vortex of an unprecedented intellectual, social, and political ferment unleashed by the cataclysmic events of the first half of the twentieth century, particularly the years following the First World War and the Bolshevik Revolution. This was a world in which anything, and everything, seemed possible. From Woodrow Wilson's promise of self-determination for colonized peoples to Vladimir Lenin's support for national liberation struggles to the heady mixture of anarchism, syndicalism, socialism, communism, feminism, anti-racism,

[4] A phrase immortalized by Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (Michael Joseph, 1994).

[5] See, in particular, Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Glenda Sluga and Patricia Calvin (eds.), *Internationalisms: A Twentieth-Century History* (Cambridge University Press, 2016); Miguel B. Jeronimo and Jose P. Monteiro, *Internationalism, Imperialism and the Formation of the Contemporary World: The Pasts of the Present* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Miralini Sinha, Donna Guy, and Angela Woollacott, *Feminisms and Internationalism* (Wiley-Blackwell, 1999); Marc Matera and Susan K. Kent, *The Global 1930s: The International Decade* (Routledge, 2017); Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anti-Colonial Nationalism* (Oxford University Press, 2009); and Ali Raza, Franziska Roy, and Benjamin Zachariah, *The Internationalist Moment: South Asia, Worlds, and World Views, 1917–39* (Sage, 2014).

[6] Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (Columbia University Press, 2004).

[7] See, for instance, Philipp Blomm, *Vertigo Years: Europe 1900–1914* (Basic Books, 2010); Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Mariner Books, 2000); Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (W.W. Norton, 2001); Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*.

fascism, revolutionary terrorism, Pan-Islamism, and Pan-Asianism, this was a world seemingly on the brink of transformative change. The present with its tyranny was no longer desirable, or even tenable.

Keeping this backdrop in view, I cover a period of four decades, from the eve of the First World War to the immediate aftermath of decolonization. Through a geography that goes beyond the colony and metropole, I chart the intellectual and political journeys of key individuals in revolutionary networks that linked cities and villages in northern India to North America, East Asia, Europe, and the Soviet Union. The individuals I cover are exiled dissidents, migrant workers, students, lascars, peasants, and religious mendicants, all united by a desire to remake the world. My aim is to show the varying inflections of communist and leftist internationalism over this period and how the dream it kindled momentarily receded in the embers of a violent post-war and decolonizing world. In doing so, I demonstrate the diverse and changing contours of leftist politics – a broad platform encompassing a dizzying variety of political expressions – and its relationship with global intellectual and political trends. Viewed this way, this book is a contribution to a world history of communist and leftist internationalism from a South Asian perspective.

Situating the Left

When does this story begin? Where does it originate? It is worth starting from these questions, not least because they have framed the way the Left in South Asia is understood and written about. Both questions are also derived from a nationalist reading of the Left's history. The tone for these frameworks was set by one of the first, and certainly the most influential, scholarly studies on the communist movement in India. Published in 1959 by political scientists Gene Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller, *Communism in India* was written under the auspices of the Institute for South Asia Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. It was also funded by the Ford Foundation. Both sources of institutional support give a clue to the book's central concerns and assumptions.[8] The first chapter began its account by pointing out that, 'although concrete attempts to plant the Russian flag there were abortive, India, the pivot of the British Empire, was for centuries an object of tsarist ambitions'. From there, it was only a short leap, literally a paragraph's worth, to discussing how the Bolshevik regime only carried forward Russia's tsarist

[8] See, for instance, Ishan Ashutosh, 'America's Battle over South Asia: Imagining the Region in the Second World War', www.saada.org/tides/article/americas-battle-over-south-asia (accessed 23 February 2017).

ambitions. Much like the Tsars before them, the Bolsheviks understood 'that even a *threat* to British power in India would undermine British power the world over'. To be effective, though, 'the Bolsheviks needed both a revolutionary plan and revolutionary agents'.[9]

This was how Indian revolutionaries stepped into a history that was always understood as a history external to them. It was never theirs to begin with. *Communism in India* was not the only monograph making this charge. In explicitly situating the history of Indian 'communism' outside of 'India', Overstreet and Windmiller were building on earlier histories framed by colonial officials and the colonial archive itself. Each act of colonial writing prior to *Communism in India* helped etch a rough framework through which communism could be understood and made legible in terms of language and conceptual framings. Central to this framework was the assumption that 'communism', however defined, was foreign to India. Overstreet and Windmiller extended this argument in a scholarly endeavour that helped foreground the question of foreignness or origins in other scholarly studies on the Left in South Asia. Their concluding, and rather foreboding, note to the book left little doubt where communists would be situated in historiography. Following a detailed commentary on the prospects of the Communist Party of India (CPI) in Indian politics, they warned that 'up to now, [the CPI's] nature has been more Communist than Indian … Should it become even a little more Indian, it will be truly a force to be reckoned with.'[10]

My purpose, though, is obviously not to quarrel with a text written in the 1950s. *Communism in India* was clearly a product of its time. Even if it was shaped by the Cold War, it was still a thorough empirical account of communist politics in India. What is of interest to me is how the question of foreignness came to foreground and dominate any discussion of the communist movement in South Asia. It was no accident that *Communism in India* took the question of origins, or rather foreignness, as its starting point. Indeed, this charge had been central to the colonial and post-colonial state's attempts in delegitimizing communists in both India and Pakistan. Nationalist histories in both countries sought to efface other histories of belonging. And prominent among them was the history of the Left. The Left in both countries was cast as a proxy of communist blocs and as an anti-national force, a term that has become even more amplified today.

[9] Gene D. Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller, *Communism in India* (Perennial Press, 1960; first published University of California Press, 1959), pp. 7–8. Emphasis in the original.

[10] Ibid., pp. 538–539.

The trope of foreignness, though, served another purpose. As Overstreet and Windmiller hinted, Indian communism's alleged failure and inherent inability to embed itself in the social and cultural fabric on the subcontinent was the paramount reason for its apparent inefficacy or failure. This issue of success and failure is another question that has dominated both scholarly and popular accounts of the Left. More recently, the evocatively titled *Marxism in India: From Decline to Debacle* claimed that 'the Marxists did not, *rather could not*, grow their roots in India'.[11] Another claimed that the inapplicability of 'Marxist scriptures' to India's 'traditional social and cultural mores' meant that communism was unable to establish a foothold in the subcontinent.[12] To that, one can add innumerable works, all attempting to answer why the Left, and communism specifically, 'failed' in India.[13] The charge is familiar. Not only were communists alien to their land, they were also bound to an inflexible, rigid, and all too foreign ideology that permitted little, if any, deviation. And so communists could best be understood through their dense and impermeable texts – a move that would be not be unfamiliar to scholars of orientalism – and which, as Overstreet and Windmiller pointed out, could only be decoded by the 'priesthood' of the communist movement.[14] Given this framework, communists and leftists of varying stripes could only exist as unthinking, unreflexive agents, responsive only to the external powers that controlled them. The interrelated questions of origins, success/failure, and ideology, then, all served to expunge these subjects from the history they helped create. They were always external to it, never really registering an impact or leaving their unique imprint on this history.

Lest this be mistaken as a mere historiographical debate, it is worth pointing out how these framings continue to have enduring consequences for political alternatives in South Asia today. Which ideas belong? Where do they originate? Who speaks for those ideas? How are they (de)legitimized? These questions continue to haunt the political

[11] Kiran Maitra, *Marxism in India: From Decline to Debacle* (Roli Books, 2012), preface (my emphasis).

[12] Satyabrata Ray Chowdhuri, *Leftism in India, 1917–1947* (Palgrave, 2007), pp. 210–211.

[13] For another, and earlier, example, see J. Bandyopadhyay, *Indian Nationalism versus International Communism: Role of Ideology in International Politics* (Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1966), who claimed that the 'available published material on Indian Communism proves beyond any doubt that in its origin and development, the Communist Party of India was not an indigenous growth; that it was launched, inspired, promoted, controlled and directed by foreign Communist agencies'. All the scholarly books referred to were published in the Anglo-American hemisphere, and included, obviously, Overstreet and Windmiller, who, in their 'brilliant and hitherto unsurpassed study … produced by far the best account of the origin and development of the Communist Party of India and its *foreign links*' (my emphasis), p. 6.

[14] Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism in India*, p. 5.

sphere in South Asia, especially in our own times when parochial nationalisms seem to be on the ascendant. And it is partly through these framings that the Left has historically been marginalized, in Pakistan more so than India and Bangladesh. This is, of course, not to uncritically endorse the Left as an antidote to contemporary populisms. But it is to argue against restricting and reducing ideas to questions of belonging.[15] In this sense, even relatively sympathetic histories on the Left have not fared any better. Here too one can detect an original/copy model at work that studies how communist and socialist ideas travelled from the 'centre' to peripheries around the world.[16]

For these reasons, I argue for a history that resists these framings. I claim no originality in this approach. In the past decade or so, some excellent studies have considerably enriched our understanding of revolutionary and leftist pasts in South Asia.[17] My work, then, extends these attempts at questioning the dominant discourse on the Left. My purpose is not simply to invert the way in which the Left has been written about. Doing so inevitably places the Left in a nationalist framework in which only its contributions to the liberation of India are highlighted and eulogized. Viewed within these confines, communist and leftist pasts will always be truncated and open to questions that mark them as alien to that specific history. That, at any rate, has been the thrust of the many hagiographical works on the Left, authored either by erstwhile comrades or by those sympathetic to them. In contrast, I am interested in charting the evolution and development of leftist thought and politics through the lives of those who inhabited them. In doing so, I trace the manifold

[15] For a powerful explication of the argument against origins, see Manan Ahmed, *A Book of Conquest: The Chachnama and Muslim Origins in South Asia* (Harvard University Press, 2016). Also see Vijay Prashad, 'Introduction: Communist Histories', in Vijay Prashad (ed.), *Communist Histories*, vol. 1 (LeftWord Books, 2016), pp. 7–28, in which he critiques scholarship that sought to cast communists either as traitors or as cultural outsiders.

[16] Benjamin Zachariah, for example, has made this argument forcefully in his study on fascism in India. See Benjamin Zachariah, 'Global Fascisms and the Volk: The Framing of Narratives and the Crossing of Lines', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 38, 4 (2015), 608–612.

[17] Notable examples include Kris Manjapra, *M.N. Roy: Marxism and Colonial Cosmopolitanism* (Routledge, 2010); Maia Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadar Movement Charted Global Radicalism and Attempted to Overthrow the British Empire* (University of California Press, 2011); and Kama Maclean, *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India: Violence, Image, Voice and Text* (Hurst, Oxford University Press, 2014). These are in addition to numerous journal articles, special issues, and edited volumes. See in particular Kama Maclean and Daniel Elam (eds.), 'Reading Revolutionaries: Texts, Acts, and Afterlives of Political Action in Late Colonial South Asia', *Postcolonial Studies* 16, 2 (2013) and Kama Maclean, Daniel Elam, and Chris Moffat (eds.), *Writing Revolution in South Asia: History, Practice, Politics* (Routledge, 2017).

trajectories that fed into the development and evolution of Communist Internationalism in colonial India. In foregrounding the politics and ethics of internationalism, I am also attempting to situate the Left within the global and international frame to which it belongs. I do so in the recognition that for those involved in this project there was little to distinguish between nationalism and internationalism. Both were intimately tied to each other. Nor could one work without the other. And yet, that is precisely what the nationalization of leftist and communist pasts has sought to conceal. Those pasts cannot be understood without foregrounding the larger global and utopian projects of which they were an integral part. This was, after all, an era of infectious and utopian idealism in which the remaking of the world was an imminent possibility. For that reason, the subjects of this story have to be placed in a geography that they would have understood and related to.

Lastly, the subjects of this book do not feature prominently in scholarly histories of communism or the Left in South Asia. None among them was viewed as an 'intellectual' worthy of close scholarly attention. This sets them somewhat apart from the usual suspects: individuals like Jayaprakash Narayan, Gangadhar Adhikari, Puran Chand Joshi, Rajani Palme Dutt and, the most iconic of them all, M.N. Roy. Roy, in particular, was for long viewed as the sole subject worthy of attention for his notable contributions to Marxist–Leninist and humanist thought. That too is a framing I want to resist. My attempt, then, is to excavate a history of communism and communist thought and the seemingly ordinary subjects who inhabited it. These constitute what I, and others, have called 'intermediate histories': histories that occupy the liminal space between intellectual histories and biographies of elite figures and the 'autonomous' subaltern domain identified by Subaltern Studies.[18] This is, in other words, the communism of the everyday. The figures who dominate the following pages may not have contributed to Marxist or Communist 'thought', if 'thought' is restricted to political treatises and theoretical contributions, but they were subjects in their own right with an acute sense of their time and place in the history they imagined themselves making. This, in other words, is a history from the ground up instead of a history of the party or the intellectuals who dominated it.

Listening to the Left

Where are those subjects to be found? They exist as disembodied fragments, as isolated voices, as apparitions, even, in colonial archives.

[18] See introduction in Raza, Zachariah, and Roy (eds.), *Internationalist Moment*.

This is despite the fact that for an ostensibly marginal political force in British India, the communist movement, and the Left at large, generated an exceptionally voluminous archival trail. That alone was a clear indication of the actual and imagined threat posed by the Left to imperial order and stability. Fixated and obsessed by this threat to a degree that has been termed paranoiac by scholars, the Raj produced vast amounts of documentation on 'seditious' individuals, organizations, spaces, print cultures, and much else besides. These reports emanated from all levels of the state, from the local police *thana* (station) and the district court to the Secretary of State of India presiding over the India Office in London. While the sources provide an intriguing insight into the specific concerns of each arm of the colonial state, they do converge in their view of communism as an imminent threat to India, the Empire, and the world at large. In the 'prose of counter insurgency',[19] the Left could only exist as an extension of a foreign power, and as a thought that was antithetical to India itself. Predictably missing in this narration were the conditions, experiences, and motivations driving individuals to radical, transformative, political action. Moreover, this was also where the first histories of the Left were authored. Given the sheer volume of reporting material devoted to the Left, both the Raj and the India Office in London periodically issued authoritative and consolidated accounts of the communist and revolutionary movement in India. Intended as concise historical primers on Indian Communism 101 for concerned officials, they helped shape how Indian communists would be understood.

That said, it is important to point out that the meaning and understanding of 'communism' was hardly, if ever, fixed. Even for a bureaucracy accustomed to classifying, categorizing, and affixing meanings to social groups and political movements in India, 'communism', along with its attendant radical strains, was notoriously difficult to define and demarcate. Perhaps the only fixed meaning at work was that 'communism' posed a significant, and even existential, threat to the Raj. Matters became even more complicated given that there were innumerable organizations and individuals operating under the label of 'socialist', 'communist', 'revolutionary', and so on. Time and context added another layer of complexity, as political alliances and ideological affinities were often transitory, fluid, and contingent on prevailing circumstances. Thus, it was quite common for ostensibly 'communal' or communitarian political movements and individuals to express an ideological affinity

[19] A concept introduced by Ranajit Guha. See his article 'The Prose of Counterinsurgency', in Ranajit Guha and Gayatri C. Spivak (eds.), *Selected Subaltern Studies* (Oxford University Press, 1988).

with the ideals of the Bolshevik Revolution in the 1920s. It was usual, for instance, for the same individuals to appear both under the categories of 'Sikh Affairs' *and* 'Communism'. That in turn was a function of a period in which the meaning of 'communism' or 'bolshevism' was hardly fixed even within international communist and internationalist movements. Similarly, the threat of political 'radicalism' was itself relational to political norms at any point in time. A 'radical' position in 1915, for instance, could well be considered a centrist position in the 1930s. Related to this issue was the question of who was involved in the task of categorization and classification. Unsurprisingly, the most elastic understanding of the 'Left' or 'Communism' came from the security and intelligence services of the Raj. Their counterparts in the civil and administrative services often had a different and somewhat measured view. Perhaps counter-intuitively, the most restrictive definition of these terms came from the Left itself. Given the intense factionalism within the Left and its many adjuncts, political rivals were quick to brand each other as ideologically deviant and unorthodox. Finally, matters became trickier still when it came to the realm of ideas. Which ideas, after all, could be classified as 'leftist', 'communist' or 'socialist'? In the 1920s, for example, ideas routinely labelled as 'Bolshevik' or 'communist' were part of a wider vocabulary and grammar of politics used by political activists of all hues and stripes.

For all these reasons, I have avoided using the terms 'communist' or 'leftist' or 'socialist' in a fixed way. I use them interchangeably to convey the complexity and relationality of ideas and political affiliations. That does not mean, of course, that labels did not matter. They did. Very much so, in fact. Especially to those invested in them, whether they were colonial officials or leftists/communists/socialists. I thereby use them selectively when conveying the perspective of those whose stories animate this book. But I do so in the recognition that political boundaries were always amorphous and constantly in flux. Not doing so would leave us with hermetically sealed ideological compartments in which there is little sense of the amorphousness of ideas and how they changed over time.

To return to the question of the archive, the Left itself was not far behind in leaving its set of archival traces. Leftist organizations published an astounding array of materials that included, but were not limited to, pamphlets, newspapers, theoretical treatises, histories, biographies, autobiographies, and meticulously documented speeches, resolutions, meetings, rallies, and demonstrations. Indeed, so vast is this collection that I frequently found myself sympathizing with the predicament of intelligence officials who often complained about having to read bombastic, theoretically dense, voluminous and, occasionally, sleep-inducing

tracts. This is again where the official archive became the most extensive repository for this literature. Publications were often reproduced, preserved, and translated in their entirety by colonial officials. For its part, the Left also meticulously archived and reproduced its documents, or those that were available anyway. Decades after independence, both the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) produced multi-volume histories and source anthologies of the communist movement in India.[20] These were the authoritative and official versions of their interlocked histories. Other edited collections, of colonial reports and leftist documents, were also published by those affiliated to the Left. More anthologies, histories, biographies, autobiographies, and other documents were published in a variety of languages across India.

Still, for all their rich detail and variety, there were other sources and documents missing. For most of their existence in colonial India, communist and revolutionary movements were proscribed and forced to operate underground. In doing so, they regularly destroyed documentary evidence that could implicate them for their seditious activities. The same was true after independence in India, and more so in Pakistan, where activists were politically persecuted by governments and dictatorships implacably opposed to communism. The first casualties of these acts of wilful destruction were everyday correspondences and brief published tracts that bore witness to how deeply communism was embedded in the everyday. What largely survived was what the state and the central communist leadership considered as 'official' or representative of the excised histories they chose to tell. For that reason, historians of 'subversive' movements begin their task with histories that have already been disciplined. Much the same, of course, can be said about virtually any other movement, but the case of the Left is particularly pronounced in this respect. Indeed, the absence of these documents is an enduring testament to how the Left was treated by the colonial state and its successors.

Nevertheless, the historian is still left with a voluminous official and non-official archive to contend with. These sources are a testament to both the changing nature and the varying inflections of the leftist movement in India. They reflect the metaphorical 'languages' through which the Left spoke. The first, and the most easily identifiable, was the language of orthodoxy. This way of speaking was replete with dense and theoretical arguments. Published in treatises, party communiqués,

[20] See G. Adhikari, M.B. Rao, and Mohit Sen (eds.), *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India* (People's Publishing House, 1971) and Jyoti Basu (ed.), *Documents of the Communist Movement in India* (National Book Agency, 1977).

resolutions, and more, and faithfully reproduced in the authorized histories of the communist movement in India, the language of orthodoxy was the language of ideology and ideological conformity. Its authors, all highly educated, all men, were intellectuals committed to the theoretical frameworks of Marxism–Leninism. Those frameworks were assiduously deployed in understanding and interpreting the conditions they were operating in. Moreover, these arguments were also made in tandem with debates within the international communist movement and with the official line of Moscow. It is of course tempting to cast this language as disconnected from reality, as many did at the time, and have done so since. More than anything else, it was the communists' alleged ideological obtuseness, rigidity, and purity that marked them out as different and divorced from the reality of India. To be sure, there is much force in that claim. And yet, that charge could just as well apply to other parties across the political spectrum, all of whom in some way imagined the reality they saw themselves addressing. It would also underestimate the underlying appeal, strength, and utopianism of those ideological frameworks, which incorporated India in a universal arc of history instead of relegating it to an irrecoverable site of historical difference.

Everyday politics, though, had its own requirements. This is where the language of orthodoxy proved inadequate. If the communist movement was always conscious of its interlocutors in Moscow and the international communist movement, it was equally sensitive to, if not more so, to its immediate audience in India. This was where the Left created, appropriated, and translated Marxist–Leninist idioms in familiar social, cultural, and religious idioms. This was the language of everydayness. And it is this language that has been most neglected in many analyses of the communist movement in India. The world this language inhabited was constituted of public meetings, rallies, poetry, newspapers, pamphlets, posters, and much else. Within this sphere, 'communism' was anything but a 'foreign import' or an ideology dislocated from India. Meant both for the audience they appealed to and for many activists themselves, the language of everydayness was often expunged from the official record, and not least the official histories of the communist movement and in the histories of its contemporaneous and later detractors. Indeed, this language was often disowned by party intellectual themselves, who often prized ideological conformity and purity over the exigencies of everyday politics. And in the puritan and stifled atmosphere wrought by Stalinization, any evidence of this language was frequently used as a weapon against internal opponents or dissenters.

This in turn pointed to another language that emerges from the archive: the language of interiority. Evident in internal documents,

pamphlets, newspapers, memoirs, letters, reported conversations in police reports and so on, this language was addressed to other activists, interlocutors, opponents, and allies. While there is relatively little in terms of sources to go on when it comes to charting internal discussions, the documents we have sketch a world rich in intellectual and political debates, dialogues, and conflict. If anything, these sources point towards the richness and diversity within the broad umbrella of the Left. They also provide an insight into the conflicts – ranging from ideological disputes to accusations of personal impropriety – that fractured the Left into a multitude of communist, socialist, and revolutionary camps. More than anything else, though, these documents also serve to humanize leftist cadres. Otherwise portrayed as unreflective, single-minded, unidimensional figures, the individuals that emerge from these sources are conflicted, complicated, and errant beings. In other words, they are all too human.

Yet, their full humanity is precisely what is negated in official reporting and in the histories that echo them. In documents produced by the state, these individuals emerge as irrational, fanatical figures, devoid of any complexity, except as dogged, irascible individuals implacably opposed to the Empire. Alongside the many commentaries produced by colonial officials, these sketches are most evident through another discursive repertoire: the intertwined languages of coercion, evasion, and defiance. A product of confessions, interrogations, judicial testimonies, and deliberate misrepresentations designed to mislead authorities, these languages cast leftist cadres in shades far removed from their public and private personas. Here, one finds activists disavowing their politics, forswearing their activism, pleading their innocence, and betraying their erstwhile comrades. Some consciously used idioms they imagined would be intelligible to state functionaries to escape harsher sentencing or torture. Thus, Muslims, Sikhs, and others, might invoke their faith to prove how an atheistic ideology could never really appeal to them. Others, though, do emerge as 'fanatics' and uncompromising ideologues, defiant and proud in their replies to police interrogators, district magistrates, sessions court judges, and other state functionaries, refusing to disavow their politics or deny their complicity in one crime or the other. Some spoke this language on their way to colonial jails across British India and through to the Andaman Islands. Others sang it on their long walk to the gallows.

My purpose in explicitly pointing out these metaphorical languages or voices through which the Left speaks from the archive is to draw attention to the importance of creating a multifaceted portrayal of the Left. To my mind, this is precisely what has eluded many histories of leftist movements in India. Barring some notable exceptions, they

listened to the Left in only one or a few voices, never quite taking a fuller measure of the variety of voices through which the Left made itself known and heard.

Utopian Times, Utopian Subjects

Even so, for all the Left's multivocality, there was still a point where the cacophony of languages and dreams converged. There was, after all, a future to be claimed. Indeed, the most striking feature of this era is the sheer variety of utopian horizons on offer, and it is in these horizons where these figures can best be placed and understood. I offer this reading keeping in mind other interpretations that have been offered for leftist thought and politics in India. To point out a few, it was commonplace for historians of Indian communism to begin their studies with a detailed analysis of socio-economic conditions.[21] With impressive statistics on landholding patterns, rural indebtedness, exorbitant land revenue rates, unemployment levels, low wages and so on, the implication was clear: the development of leftist politics was rooted in specific socio-economic conditions, even if the link between political activism and material conditions was not always made explicit. In a Marxian reading, it was self-evident that there was a deep connection between the two. Others, following from decades of social and peasant histories, spoke of a 'peasant consciousness' in tracing the development of political thought and action.[22] Other explanations cast leftist politics as a product of a narrowly defined national liberation struggle. More recently, some much-needed interpretations have emerged, which, among other things, chart the germination of leftist and revolutionary ideas within transnational and cosmopolitan contexts. The focus here is on the crossing of literal and metaphorical borders to portray a world marked by intellectual, social, and political ferment.[23]

In what follows, my debt to these approaches will be evident, some more so than others. I am, however, more interested in pursuing another line of inquiry through which the Left and the communist movement can

[21] See, for instance, Bhagwan Josh, *Communist Movement in the Punjab, 1926–47* (Anupama Publications, 1979) and S. Gajrani, *Peasant Movement in Punjab* (South Asia Books, 1987).

[22] As an example, see Mridula Mukherjee, *Peasants in Non-Violent Revolution: Practice and Theory* (Sage, 2004) and not least the 'autonomous domain' identified by Subaltern Studies.

[23] See in particular Kris Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement: German and Indian Intellectuals across Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2014); Sugata Bose and Kris Manjapra (eds.), *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones: South Asia and the Global Circulation of Ideas* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

be understood. One after the other, the sources we have attest to how their subjects had a very intimate relationship with the era they lived in and which they perceived as extraordinary and tumultuous. In other words, these subjects were *constituted* in large measure by an affective relationship with Time. They had an acute sense that they were citizens of a rapidly changing world. This was, after all, a world marked by unprecedented tumult, conflict, and intellectual ferment. It seemed as if the world of the old, with its norms, traditions, and oppressions, was in its death throes. But its imminent death also foretold a long-awaited birth. Indeed, it is striking to see the range of metaphors used at the time – of births, of deaths, of pregnancies, of adulthood, of coming of age, of waking from a long slumber – all speaking of the imminent arrival of a new world. Put simply, this was a messianic conception of the world. What did this world look like? Briefly put, it varied from individual to individual, but there were some unifying threads. This was a world free of empire, capitalism, and social oppression, with all three being broadly defined and understood. This was also a world of internationalism, solidarity, and unity of all the 'weak', and the 'oppressed', as one magazine put it. Still, these were vaguely defined visions. What united them all in more tangible ways was an affective relationship with their time: the Time of Now.

What did it mean to live in the Time of Now? In asking this question, I am taking my lead from Walter Benjamin's conception of *jetztzeit* or 'Now-Time' in his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History'. For Benjamin, *jetztzeit* signified a conception of time in which every moment was alive with radical possibilities that could fracture the present and liberate it from an otherwise recursive and hollowed-out continuum of time.[24] This was where the 'transformation of history' could take place. And it is this intimate and affective relationship with time that interests me here. To illustrate this better, the figures animating this book became political subjects in an era in which the dominating discourse of Empire claimed Time and History for itself. Colonial subjects were either not worthy of freedom or were not worthy *yet*. Placed within an endlessly deferred and unrealizable temporal horizon, colonial subjects were destined to shuffle along endlessly under colonial tutelage before they would be deemed worthy of autonomy or freedom. In other words, they were destined to endlessly inhabit, to invoke Ernst Bloch, the time of the

[24] Walter Benjamin, 'Thesis on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (Schocken Books, 1969). I am also indebted in this reading to Giorgio Agamben's treatment of *jetztzeit*. See Leland de la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben: A Critical Introduction* (Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 102.

'not-yet', or what Dipesh Chakrabarty evocatively termed the 'waiting room of history'.[25] And yet it is striking to see how many of the individuals in this story insisted on inhabiting the 'time of the now' far before the leaders of the Indian nationalist movement insisted on the same. Put differently, the time for freedom was the time of now, with every moment holding out the promise of transformation and revolution. In their understanding of their moment, these figures inhabited a revolutionary time in which anything was possible. Not only was a new world within reach, it was well on its way. For all intents and purposes, then, the individuals in this book were already living in the future.

Why is this significant? Because their orientation towards the future and the world to come explains in great measure their motivations, politics, sheer perseverance, and frequently, their suicidal determination. And it is precisely the seductive appeal of this imagination and its relationship to both the political and the self that has received negligible scholarly attention. It is tempting, of course, to consider these ideas as utopian or idealistic, as many did at the time and have done so since. But that would be to entrap the Left in a reading that takes the post-colonial nation state in South Asia as the predetermined outcome of decolonization. Once that is taken as a starting point, other possibilities, other political futures, seem all too marginal, eccentric, and unviable. In other words, this approach reduces these horizons to a peripheral story within an overarching telos of nationalism. And yet, this is not the only reason for neglecting the astonishing variety of alternate, open-ended, and viable political futures on offer in this era.[26] As Manu Goswami reminds us, a key reason is methodological. Through an engagement with Reinhart Koselleck, she points out how historians are more attuned to privileging histories of experience over histories of expectations. Doing so 'has worked to propel studies of movements, institutions, and categories regarded as durable, prevalent, or immediately recognizable in the present'.[27] For those reasons, perhaps, these dreams and their relationship to the political have received scant attention from historians.

Within the constellation of political horizons on offer in the age of internationalism, what distinguished many leftists was their unshakeable conviction in the inevitability of progress, historical change, and enlightened futures. For doctrinaire Marxists, History was subject to fixed laws

[25] See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 8.

[26] Gary Wilder, for instance, makes a similar point in *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World* (Duke University Press, 2015).

[27] Manu Goswami, 'Imaginary Futures and Colonial Internationalisms', *The American Historical Review* 117, 5 (2012), 1485.

that could be scientifically understood and acted upon, which made it distinct from the crude utopianism and idealism that Marxism was opposed to. For Ernst Bloch in his magisterial *The Principle of Hope*, Marxism, unlike the other utopian schemes he surveyed, offered both a theory of utopia *and* a method of creating it.[28] Whatever else Marxism may have meant to the figures involved, it was clear that there was a telos, a method, and a political subject at the heart of this transformative project. Still, that did not make it any less dubious for its universalizing claims. That much, at any rate, has been made clear by the crucial interventions of post-colonialism and post-structuralism. Utopias and universals were rightly suspect. They also could not be divorced from their dark legacy of totalitarianism. And yet, that would be to disregard the drawing power of these claims for many colonized subjects who felt expunged from a universal history and a universal arc of progress. Indeed, they yearned to be part of this universal history. They also yearned to make this history, not as supplicants or passive recipients forever destined to play catch-up, but as equals. The time the subjects of this book imagined themselves inhabiting was a time that was *de-territorialized*. This was a time that promised salvation and revolutionary transformation for the world at large, whether it was Europe or its colonies. Put simply, their time was an enchanted time.[29] This was the perspective of the subjects that animate this book. This was a story they could be a part of.

Instead of evaluating their utopian claims for their theoretical validity, as others have done, I am more interested in understanding how their utopian politics was woven in through their present. In doing so, I am taking my lead from the collective interventions of Michael Gordin, Helen Tilley, and Gyan Prakash. Together, they point out how utopias are an indictment of the present. Moreover, the politics of utopia also offers an opportunity to excavate the 'conditions of possibility' or 'the conditions of imaginability'. Utopianisms are not just simply ways of imagining the future, 'but can also be understood as concrete practices through which historically situated actors seek to reimagine their present

[28] Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 3 vols. (MIT Press, 1995).

[29] Here, one can also make an instructive comparison with ardently nationalist (and communal) articulations during this period that spoke of an enchanted space instead of an enchanted time. One of the best examples of this, to my mind, is V.D. Savarkar's *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?* (1928), which lends India the status of both a motherland and a holy land. This articulation of a sacred and enchanted space that is home to a great Hindu race, nation, and civilization stands in marked contrast with the internationalist imagination of a de-territorialized time that weaved disparate cultures, territories, and populations together in a universal arc of progress.

and transform it into a plausible future'.[30] More than understanding it as an idea, then, I seek to excavate utopianism as a practice and as a lived ethic. Doing so may allow us a fuller understanding of the subjects of this book, of the specificity of their time and place, and the imaginative, cultural, and social resources they drew on to construct a world driven by the politics of expectation, the politics of waiting, and the politics of anticipation.

While I have attempted to sketch those practices and ethics throughout this book, the practice that most interests me here is the act of writing histories, memoirs, and (auto)biographies. More than any other practice, these interlinked genres provide us a with profound insight into the subjects who lie at the heart of this book. By way of a (long) introduction, leftists – organizations and individuals both – have been at the forefront of authoring publications that document their self-professedly critical role in the struggle against the Raj. The anxiousness, prolificacy, and meticulousness with which these histories and source anthologies were written, published, circulated, and narrated, indicated that the Left sought to write itself into histories from which it had been excluded. In part, then, this was a riposte to the collective amnesia of nationalist historians who either ignored or misrepresented the Left's contribution in the struggle for independence and self-determination. It was also a response to the lingering gaze of Empire, faithfully replicated in histories condemning the Left. More than anything else, though, it was an indictment of the discipline of history itself. Thus, as far as one leading member of the communist movement was concerned, history writing that proclaimed the much-vaunted values of neutrality, detachment, and objectivity was 'barren and imperialistically tendentious'. Indeed, for him, any historian worth his or her salt must be on the side of the enslaved, the oppressed, the downtrodden.[31]

It is tempting to dismiss this as propaganda, as many no doubt did. But this critique did get to the heart of the imagined tyranny of histories inaugurated and indelibly marked by the colonial endeavour in India and elsewhere. For those reasons, history writing – their *own* history writing – was an essential and key practice in leftist and revolutionary politics. And in claiming to represent the downtrodden, an otherwise anodyne act of history-writing was transformed into an ethical practice with clear moral stakes attached to it. Whether published in memoirs and scholarly

[30] Michael Gordin, Helen Tilley, and Gyan Prakash (eds.), *Utopia/Dystopia: Conditions of Historical Possibility* (Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 2.
[31] Sohan Singh Josh, *Hindustan Ghadar Party: A Short History* (People's Publishing House, 1978), p. 3.

accounts, serialized in newspapers and pamphlets or invoked in public rallies, meetings, and demonstrations, revolutionary histories were ubiquitous in leftist practices. What did these histories look like, though? In short, they were reverential commemorations of past struggles as well as scathing indictments of imperial rule. They were thus the exact converse of colonial histories, and they exercised a power on the imagination that was fully recognized the colonial state. To that end, as Durba Ghosh points out, amateur and popular history writing was a key part of anti-colonial resistance and political insurrection.[32] Remembrance was a revolutionary act. And for that reason, these histories were continually proscribed and their authors prosecuted. One of them, a leading member of the Ghadar Party, Bhai Parmanand, was even sentenced to death – later converted to transportation for life – in large part for his authorship of *Tarikh-i-Hind* (History of India). In sentencing Parmanand, the judicial tribunal conceded that the 'historian enjoys certain privileges'. Indeed, 'criticism, exposure, and condemnation of what is wicked or unethical, approbation of what is noble and chivalrous, and vindication of the truth are some of the privileges conceded to him'. But he had 'no right, under the guise of a historical treatise to malign, traduce or calumniate anybody, much less a ruling race, with the object of bringing the subject of his criticism into hatred and contempt which, as a citizen owning allegiance to a Government, he has no right to assail'. Put briefly, *Tarikh-i-Hind* 'was nothing short of sedition clothed in an ostensible historical treatise'.[33]

There were few instances as illuminating as this one about the enduring power of history writing. Its credibility as a historical account aside, *Tarikh-i-Hind* exemplified the role that history and history writing played in leftist and revolutionary politics. Through these histories, Indian revolutionaries sought to insert themselves in a specific genealogy and legacy of struggle. They were the inheritors of those imagined legacies. And they would be the ones to carry the torch forward. Before one could reimagine the present and reclaim the future, there was a history to be written. In short, there were histories to be recovered, there were histories to be reclaimed, there were histories to be made. The past served as an inspiration, as a lesson, as an aspiration even. Indeed, in a troubled present, the past offered a way, perhaps the only way, in which the future could not be foreclosed. The future remained open-ended, full of promise, and, more importantly, *theirs*. But for that, the past, in its beauty as

[32] Durba Ghosh, *Gentlemanly Terrorists: Political Violence and the Colonial State in India, 1919–1947* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 63.
[33] F.C. Isemonger and J. Slattery, *An Account of the Ghadr Conspiracy, 1913–1915* (1919), p. 194.

well as ugliness, had to be theirs too. For a movement oriented towards the future, then, the Left had a deep, meditative, and constitutive relationship with the past.

A brief word on other genres: memoirs and (auto)biographies. One can read these as ego-documents (with more emphasis on the ego than the document), largely preoccupied with cementing their authors' legacies and giving a befitting response to their detractors, be it colonial or nationalist accounts, or even their opponents within the Left.[34] But I also read these texts as an insistence to be the subject of one's story. They had long been, and still are, cast as ephemeral or marginal subjects in a story that was never considered theirs. They were dim-witted proxies at best, traitors at worst. Even in histories sympathetic to the Left, official or otherwise, they were mere recipients of ideas that had been fashioned elsewhere by inordinately European, highly educated, men. At best, those ideas had been crafted by a few Indians, who were, again, elite, highly educated, men. For those reasons, they were viewed as ordinary subjects, never theoretical subjects, whose lives were worth telling, and emblematic of a history they helped make. We were thus mostly left with intellectual and party histories that rarely reflected the rich life-worlds of those who inhabited this politics and this moment. This is where writing and narrating one's story became even more urgent.

Most of these accounts were published well after independence at a time when histories of the liberation struggle were being written. In their villages, towns, and regions, their authors were lionized as *desh bhagats* (patriots). Others were remembered as martyrs, some more renowned than others. But on the national level, there was little, if any, recognition of their struggles and sacrifices. One of the most iconic of them all, Sohan Singh Bhakna, spoke for many in an appropriately titled pamphlet *Dukh* (Sorrow/Grief), writing that 'Congress historians … have deliberately drawn a veil on that glorious chapter of history which the revolutionary patriots wrote with their own blood.'[35] Somewhat ironically, in writing

[34] They were also, as Ghosh notes, didactic in intent with an aim of attracting new recruits. Together, these accounts foregrounded examples of mythologized (male) revolutionaries who made great sacrifices for their nation. This was certainly the case for autobiographical accounts that were published at the height of the anti-colonial struggle. In doing so, they added to a burgeoning corpus of life histories that were already a well-established genre within the Indian nationalist movement. One reason for this, she notes via Javed Majeed, was that autobiography became the genre for conveying one's individual subjectivity and consciousness, which in turn was a response to the orientalist charge that Indians were fundamentally unmodern. See Ghosh, *Gentlemanly Terrorists*, pp. 65–66.

[35] Quoted in Sohan Singh Josh, *Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna: Life of the Founder of the Ghadar Party* (People's Publishing House, 1970), p. xxi.

their memoirs, histories, and autobiographies, our revolutionaries relied inordinately on declassified colonial archives. That was, after all, their archive too. At the height of their struggle against the Raj, their publications had been destroyed, proscribed, and confiscated, leaving them with fragmented records and broken documentary trails.[36] The colonial archive was a fuller and a more complete archive than theirs ever could be. Moreover, they were also learning about themselves through these records. After all, the Raj's policing and intelligence apparatus had kept a close eye on their movements and politics. They therefore used those records to supplement missing details on their lives and histories (leaving the historian a little bemused at encountering colonial accounts in the most unexpected of places). There was also a certain kind of voyeuristic thrill, pride, and a sense of achievement that came from quoting reports on oneself. But more than that, their purpose was also to argue against the colonial archive. This was their attempt to set the record straight and cement their legacy in the pantheon of heroes of the liberation and revolutionary struggle.

It is also worth pointing out how the impulse to record, retell, and narrate was primarily a masculine endeavour. In contrast to their male counterparts, far fewer women recorded their experiences in the leftist and revolutionary movement at any length. Even so, the accounts we have are crucial in providing a glimpse into the varied experiences, lives, and unique circumstances of women within the movement.[37] Together, these testimonies are an enduring testament to the erasure of women in

[36] Gangadhar Adhikari (ed.), *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India*, vol. 1: *1917–1922* (People's Publishing House, 1971), p. viii.

[37] As one of the most striking examples, see the excellent work by K. Lalita, V. Kannabiran, and Rama Melkote (eds.), *We Were Making History: Life Stories of Women in the Telengana People's Struggle* (Zed Books, 1990). Other notable examples include, but are not restricted to, the memoirs and accounts of Renu Chakravartty, *Communists in Indian Women's Movement, 1940–1950* (People's Publishing House, 1980); Manikuntala Sen, *In Search of Freedom: An Unfinished Journey* (Stree, 2001); Bina Das, *Bina Das: A Memoir* (Zubaan Books, 2010); Kalpana Dutt, *Chittagong Armoury Raiders: Reminiscences* (People's Publishing House, 1979); and Vimla Dang, *Fragments of an Autobiography* (Asha Jyoti, 2007). For scholarly engagements, see the incredibly useful bibliographical compendium of women's life histories in the colonial and postcolonial period, in Anju Vyas and Ratna Sharma (eds.), *Indian Women: Biographies and Autobiographies* (An Annotated Bibliography) (Centre for Women's Development Studies, 2013). With respect to communist and revolutionary histories, specifically, there have been some excellent works on revolutionary women in recent years. See especially Ania Loomba, *Revolutionary Desires: Women, Communism, and Feminism in India* (Routledge, 2019); Durba Ghosh, 'Revolutionary Women and Nationalist Heroes in Bengal, 1930 to the 1980s', *Gender & History* 25, 2 (2013), 355–375; Soma Marik, 'Breaking Through a Double Invisibility', *Critical Asian Studies* 45, 1 (2013), 79–118; and Kama Maclean, *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India*, and in particular chapter 3.

revolutionary histories. They are also a reminder of the shortcomings of communist and revolutionary movements that did not pay sufficient attention to the question of women's emancipation. The revolutionary subject we have, then, is very much a gendered subject. The tone adopted in these (largely male) memoirs and autobiographies also gives a similar impression: 'I led', 'I argued', 'I convinced them', 'I did this that or the other' – the list of such expressions goes on and on. This was an omniscient view of the world, with its (masculine) subject cast as the maker of history, and not simply one who is driven by history. That said, even in foregrounding themselves as the makers of history, there was a sense of manifest destiny and historical inevitability at work. Nor could it have been otherwise. This interplay between autonomy/agency and manifest destiny was the hallmark of their historical imagination.

Fredric Jameson makes a similar point when he locates the tension between voluntarism and fatalism in the delicate balance between Marxism as a practical project and the imaginative resources required to will it into being. This balance, he argues,

> rests on a conception of historical dynamics that posits that the whole new world is objectively in emergence all around us, without our necessarily perceiving it at once, so that alongside our conscious praxis and our strategies for producing change, we may take a more receptive and interpretive stance.

He adds that with the

> proper instruments and registering apparatus, we may detect the allegorical stirrings of a different state of things, the imperceptible and even immemorial ripenings of the seeds of time, the subliminal and subcutaneous eruptions of whole new forms of life and social relations.[38]

What were those instruments, though? How did these subjects register and detect the stirrings of a new world? It was not simply that the world of the old was seemingly collapsing around them – that, after all, was all too evident and observable. It was also that they made their worlds legible through their bodies and selves. This was again where autobiographies were particularly illuminating. The stories they told all hinged on journeys of personal transformation. For those reasons, perhaps, these autobiographies and memoirs also read startlingly like another genre: the *safarnama* (travelogue). The travels those texts speak of were not simply actual journeys: they were also intellectual journeys. Together, they told a story of widening horizons, of coming of age, of rebirths, of transformations, of overcoming. And this was how their writers read their worlds too.

[38] Frederic Jameson, 'Utopia as Method, or the Uses of the Future', in Gordin, Tilley, and Prakash (eds.), *Utopia/Dystopia*, p. 26.

Just like themselves, a new world was also coming into being, in an inexorably forward movement towards revolutionary transformation. Both the self and the world were tied to and co-constitutive of each other in their long-prophesied journey towards emancipatory futures.

That this reading was selective and reductive in how it understood the past, present, and future goes without saying. In some ways, this was reflective of the utopian imagination that Karl Mannheim pointed to in *Ideology and Utopia*. Instead of envisioning utopia as 'an articulation of a planned ideal society', Mannheim understood it as a 'socially located critical stance'. It is through this framing that one can understand how

> the innermost structure of the mentality of a group can never be as clearly grasped as when we attempt to understand its conception of time in the light of its hopes, yearnings, and purposes. On the basis of these purposes and expectations, a given mentality orders not merely future events, but also the past. Events which at first glance present themselves as a mere chronological cumulation, from this point of view take on the character of *destiny*.[39]

It is difficult to overstate the power of this imagination; millenarian in its sensibility and outlook. Dreams were, and could be, powerful.[40] A sense of destiny even more so. And yet, that is precisely what has been understated in our reading of the Left, especially in recent times when the utopian is viewed as long past its sell-by date. There was, then, a deep, intimate, and an almost oneiric relationship between the utopian and the political. The utopian imagination had the power to drive men and women to incredible, astonishing, and even suicidal lengths. It drove the subjects of this book to far-flung continents, to a life on the run, to a clandestine existence, to jails and, for some, to the gallows. The utopian imagination made these subjects as much they helped make this moment utopian.

Chapters

This book, then, offers narratives, necessarily broken and fragmented, that seek to embed the utopian subjects of this story within their context and moment. The next chapter, 'Travellers, Migrants, Rebels', traces

[39] Partly quoted in Gordin, Tilley, and Prakash (eds.), *Utopia/Dystopia*, p. 5. Also see Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954), p. 188.

[40] Few scholars have demonstrated that as powerfully as Yuri Slezkine. In his magisterial work on the Russian revolution, he understands Bolshevism as a millenarian movement that was driven more by hopes, dreams, and desires than by cold, calculated theoretical sophistry. See Yuri Slezkine, *House of Government: A Saga of the Russian Revolution* (Princeton University Press, 2017).

Indian networks that forged a radical anti-imperialist politics in the diaspora. These networks later fed into the development and evolution of the leftist movement in British India. Through the lives of key figures, I trace how networks of radicalism emerged and thrived in the global arena. Along with networks of labourers, migrants, and lascars, I focus primarily on the Ghadar and the Khilafat movements. Through these circuits and the figures involved in them, I sketch how an itinerant life provided a foray into revolutionary politics and was in turn intimately connected to a revolutionary ethic. In doing so, I also examine an oft-neglected question of how political radicalism was deeply wedded to distinct spaces and spatial imaginaries. In tracing how ideas and lived experiences – and thereby intellectual and social histories – were co-constitutive of each other, I chart the antecedents of the communist movement in British India.

I continue this story in the third chapter, 'Break with the Old World'. Using memoirs, intelligence accounts, and hitherto unused sources from the Comintern archives, I follow the journeys of Indian revolutionaries to and through Moscow. For revolutionaries from the colonized world, Moscow offered support, sustenance, and a vision for a liberated future. It was also a site of wonder and amazement, where a new world and a new human was being inaugurated. For those who learnt their communism in the Soviet Union, Moscow was both a physical embodiment of a break with History and a vision of a utopic world within reach. Through the lifeworlds of 'Moscow graduates', I trace the history of the varied and multilayered engagements between the Communist International (Comintern) and communist groups in India from the heady and millenarian days of the Leninist moment to its calamitous Stalinist successor.

The next chapter, 'This Time Is Ours', looks at a regional expression of leftist politics. I examine how the politics and ethics of Communist Internationalism acquired a distinctly regional flavour through a case study of the Kirti Kisan Party and its successors in the Punjab. Partly financed, supported and constituted by the Ghadar Party, the Kirti Party was the most prominent communist network in British Punjab. And alongside the Communist Party of India (CPI), it was also the only communist group in India to have direct relations with the Comintern. Not only is this chapter an attempt to move beyond CPI-centred histories of the Left; it is also an examination of how intimately communism was woven in with localized idioms. At the same time, it is also a reminder of how deeply local politics was tied to global developments and the politics of Communist Internationalism. In tracing this trajectory, I explore what communism meant to those involved in it. I also explore the kinds of

ethical subjects inaugurated, in person as much as in imagination, by the communist movement in India.

The fifth chapter, 'Entangled Histories', starts from the question of erasure. Leading on from the previous chapter, I examine how the memorialization of revolutionary pasts in India and Pakistan has erased a history of entanglements between the Left and other political and intellectual strands. Specifically, I take the case of Darshan Singh Pheruman, remembered today as a martyr who gave his life for the Sikh *panth*. Through his life, I examine how the Akali movement, a Sikh socio-religious political movement in the 1920s, blended in with the communist movement in the Punjab. These intersections provide a reminder of how ideas did not observe strict ideological boundaries, boundaries that only seem unbridgeable in nationalist and communitarian erasures of revolutionary pasts. This chapter, then, offers a portrait of the relative fluidity between 'communist', 'communitarian', and 'nationalist' politics of the interwar era. In doing so, it sketches an era of political possibilities that later gave way to a bitterly contested and fractured landscape with hardened political and ideological boundaries.

The sixth chapter, 'Red Scare', examines how the British Raj dealt with the communist threat. Viewed merely as a proxy of the Soviet Union, communist movements were relentlessly persecuted by the state. In an examination of the colonial state's evolving response to the communist movement through an analysis of 'conspiracy cases' and other legislative, executive, and coercive mechanisms, I trace how the colonial state was instrumental in casting 'communism' and leftist politics in the subcontinent as essentially alien to India. Central to this argument was the way that 'communism' had been imagined by the state. Viewed from its very inception as 'unnatural' and 'foreign', and frequently likened to a 'virus' that could spread controllably if left unchecked, the state's approach to communism provides significant insights into not just the nature of the state, but also how it viewed the Indian political sphere. More importantly, it also shows how the colonial state's arguments were later appropriated by the nationalist movement and other forces inimical to the Left to delegitimize the latter's politics. More than anything else, I argue that it was the colonial state that was instrumental in fracturing the Left and its alliances with the other political movements. This explained in large measure how the Left came to be excised from histories of national liberation.

The seventh chapter, 'A Dream Deferred', explores how the dream and utopian promise of interwar internationalism faded during the upheavals of the Second World War and a violent decolonization. The Left in India was forced to choose between internationalism and

nationalism. Through the lives and politics of those involved in this fateful choice, I examine the CPI's position with respect to the 'People's War' waged by the Soviet Union against Nazi Germany and the demand for Pakistan by the All India Muslim League (AIML). As its political choices narrowed in the run-up to independence, I trace how the communists' internationalist loyalties placed it a mutually acrimonious relationship with the presumptive heirs of the Raj in India and Pakistan. In a far cry from its heyday in the early years of the interwar period, when there seemed little to separate between internationalism and nationalism, the manifold possibilities imagined by Communist Internationalism seemed at an end in the devastation wrought by Partition.

In the Epilogue, 'Utopias Lost', I provide a brief overview of what decolonization and 'independence' meant for a partitioned Left on both sides of the Radcliffe line. For many, not much had changed. If anything, both post-colonial states persecuted communists with an equal, if not greater, alacrity than their colonial predecessor. The freedom that had been attained was not the freedom that many had imagined and fought for. This was the starting point for communist politics in both India and Pakistan. Using the communists' social–economic, political, and ethical conceptions of a post-imperial and post-national *azadi* (freedom), I ask what revolutionary pasts have to offer us in our present time when the spectre of parochial and exclusionary nationalism seems to be on the ascendant in South Asia and beyond. At the very least, I argue, a history of the Left encourages a re-envisioning of ethical possibilities and subjectivities in modern South Asia. In doing so, the Left also provides a salutary reminder of how it was, and still is, an essential and integral part of the cultural, social, and political fabric of South Asia. As Overstreet and Windmiller argued in *Communism in India*, no understanding of Indian history since the First World War is possible without an examination of the communist movement and its relation to world communism and Indian nationalism.[41]

Needless to say, I could not have agreed more.

[41] Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism in India*, preface.

2 Travellers, Migrants, Rebels

> The mote in your own eye is the best magnifying glass.[1]
> Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*

Late in June 1934, a five-person delegation called on the British Consul General in New York. Claiming to represent nearly twenty organizations, the delegation was there to protest the treatment and incarceration of two British Indian subjects in Kabul, Afghanistan. The two subjects in question were Gurmukh Singh and Prithvi Singh 'Azad'. As convicted co-conspirators in an ill-fated rebellion and sworn enemies of the British Raj, both men had long been on the run from the colonial authorities until they were eventually apprehended by the Afghan government. The letter handed to the Consul General spoke of how Gurmukh Singh and Prithvi Singh had been arrested, robbed, shackled, jailed, beaten, and starved by the Afghan government. It was clear to the signatories of the letter that the Afghan government was acting at the behest of a vengeful Raj intent on persecuting the two men for their involvement in India's liberation struggle. The signatories denounced the British government and demanded that it secure the release of the two men. The letter had been signed by the Anti-Imperialist League, International Labor Defense, Philippine Anti-Imperialist League, the National Student League, United Council of Working-Class Women, the Marine Workers Industrial Union, the Chinese Anti-Imperialist League, the Transport Workers Union, the League of Struggle for Negro Rights, Irish Workers Rights, and the Turkish Education Society.[2] There were other signatories too, but this list gives a sufficient idea of the range of interest groups engaged with the Indian revolutionary movement.

While this episode was short-lived (both men were released after a year in captivity), it did convey the extent to which India's freedom struggle

[1] Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia. Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (1951), www.marxists.org/reference/archive/adorno/1951/mm/ch01.htm.

[2] IOR/L/PS/12/1588, 'Afghanistan: Ghadar Party Activities'. Afghanistan: Deportation to Russia of Gurmukh Singh and Pritvi Singh.

was a thoroughly international affair. For many working-class, anti-imperialist, anti-racist, and feminist groups in the United States and Europe, India was a *cause célèbre*.[3] Their connections with India's liberation struggle had been laid by Indian revolutionary and nationalist groups scattered across Europe, North America, and the Far East. From the first decade of the twentieth century onwards, these groups were at the forefront of India's liberation movement abroad. Together they influenced, and were influenced by, a world marked by unprecedented social and political ferment. Their story, then, is important for the insight it provides into the manifold threads of the Indian national liberation movement. Equally important their histories are significant for showing how the ground for the Indian Left was laid in India and elsewhere. Their complex and multilayered histories show how diverse strands of political radicalism came together under the larger umbrella of the Bolshevik Revolution and Communist Internationalism.

These pasts were formally acknowledged at the Communist Party of India's (CPI) congress in Amritsar in 1958. The preamble to the party constitution adopted at Amritsar recognized that the 'Communist Party of India arose in the course of our liberation struggle as a result of the efforts of Indian revolutionaries, who under the inspiration of the Great October Revolution were seeking new paths for achieving national independence'. Much later, this passage also inaugurated the official multi-volume history of the CPI. Edited by Gangadhar Adhikari, one of the leading figures in the Indian communist movement, the CPI's official history identified four distinct groups that contributed to the development of 'scientific socialism and communism' in India: (1) 'Indian national revolutionaries' operating during the First World War in Germany, Turkey, Afghanistan, and the United States; (2) 'national revolutionaries' from the Pan-Islamic Khilafat and Hijrat movement; (3) 'national revolutionaries' of the Ghadar Party, operating out of the North American west coast; and (4) 'national revolutionaries' in India itself, emerging from the left wing of the Congress Movement and other revolutionary and terrorist organizations.[4] To those, the other official history of the communist movement – commissioned by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) – added other groups. Most notably, these

[3] See in particular Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India* (Harvard University Press, 2012); Kate O'Malley, *Ireland, India and Empire: Indo-Irish Radical Connections, 1919–64* (Manchester University Press, 2008); Michele Louro, *Comrades against Imperialism: Nehru, India and Interwar Internationalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[4] Gangadhar Adhikari (ed.), *Documents of the History of Communist Party of India*, vol. 1 *(1917–1922)* (People's Publishing House, 1971), p. 1.

included cadres of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), and Indian students who learnt their Marxism–Leninism in Britain.[5]

This chapter revisits those histories in some measure. I am interested in telling this story through the lives of those who were involved in creating this revolutionary world. Through their journeys and experiences, I examine three networks – the Ghadar, Lascar, and Khilafat networks. Together, they stand as a testament to the markedly varied strands that fed into the development of the communist movement in India. At one level, then, these stories highlight the 'pre-history' of Indian communism, a history that was not merely inaugurated by the Bolshevik Revolution. More importantly, the figures at the heart of these movements exemplify the astonishingly varied personal, political, and intellectual trajectories that fed into the evolution of communism in India. These journeys are also important for highlighting the fluidity and evolution of ideas, which are too often slotted into neat categories that conceal the unpredictable ways in which ideas travel. To that end, my purpose is also to show the fluid understanding of 'communism' in this period. was in this period. I focus primarily on the 1910s, and the cataclysmic events of the First World War and the Bolshevik Revolution. Both had a profound impact on the Indian revolutionary movement abroad. Both also created the conditions for a world that seemed on the precipice of transformative change. And it is in that world that these movements and networks sought to make their lasting mark.

In Lands Far Away

In the spring of 1915, in a courtroom in Lahore, eighty-one men were charged with conspiring to overthrow the British government in India. In what became known as the First Lahore Conspiracy Case, with further supplementary cases launched in the following years on nearly two hundred others, the British Raj tried and convicted revolutionaries who had set sail from the western seaboard of North America with dreams of fomenting rebellion in India. The indictment against the revolutionaries claimed that

> a conspiracy to wage war and overthrow the British Government in India was formed in America in May 1913, and a number of Indians returned to India with that intent in 1914. In India, several recruits to the organization were added. In carrying out the objects of the conspiracy, inter alia dacoities, sometimes with murder, were committed in order to obtain money wherewith to purchase arms; attempts, sometimes successful, to seduce troops were made; arms and

[5] Harikishen Singh Surjeet, *An Outline History of the Communist Movement in India* (National Book Centre, 1993), p. 31.

ammunition procured, bombs manufactured, police officers murdered and revolutionary literature was circulated in America *en route* to India, and in India after arrival.[6]

The conspiracy in question was hatched by a newly formed party, the Ghadar, in 1913. Literally meaning 'rebellion', the party had been formed by Indians, mostly Punjabi, labourers, students, and intellectuals scattered across the western seaboard of Canada and the United States. Initially called the Pacific Coast Hindustan Association, the party took its name from the paper *Ghadar*, launched in 1913 in San Francisco. *Ghadar* left little doubt as to the aims and objectives of the movement. In its very first issue, the paper had claimed that 'our work is our name'.[7] Published in Urdu and Gurumukhi, *Ghadar*'s masthead proclaimed itself as the mortal enemy of British rule. With slogans of *Bande Matram*, the paper exhorted Indians to take up arms against the British Empire. It also provided a regular *kacha chittha* (balance sheet) of the Raj, which, among other charges, accused the Raj of annually robbing India of fifty crore rupees, impoverishing Indians, keeping them illiterate, killing millions, inflicting famines, and sowing communal divides, alongside all sorts of social and political ills.[8] This was laced through with stirring accounts of past glories and rebellions, commentaries on current affairs, and guidance for Punjabis living in North America

The details of what happened, the events leading up to the founding of Ghadar, and the aftermath of the ill-fated rebellion have been the subject of extensive commentary and scholarship. As far back as 1983, Harish Puri, one of the leading scholars on the Ghadar, felt it necessary to preface his work by asking why a new book was needed on the movement.[9] By then, more than a dozen books, autobiographies, and biographies had been published in English, Hindi, and Punjabi. Since then, dozens more – articles, books, dissertations, edited volumes, special issues, anthologies of primary sources, biographies – have appeared.[10]

[6] *Ghadr Party's Lahore Conspiracy Case: 1915 Judgement* (Archana Publications, 2006), pp. 6–7.

[7] Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*, p. 34.

[8] See for example *Ghadar*, 27 December 1916.

[9] Harish Puri, *Ghadar Movement: Ideology, Organization, Strategy*, 2nd edn (Guru Nanak Dev University, 1993).

[10] The most noteworthy monographs in recent years include Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*; Seema Sodhi, *Echoes of Mutiny: Race, Surveillance, and Indian Anti-Colonialism in North America* (Oxford University Press, 2014); J.S. Grewal, Harish Puri, and Indu Banga (eds.), *The Ghadar Movement: Background, Ideology, Action and Legacies* (Punjabi University, 2014). To these, one can add Harish Puri, *Ghadar Movement: Ideology, Organisation and Strategy* (Guru Nanak Dev University Press, 1983) and *Ghadar Movement: A Short History* (National Book Trust, 2011). Also see the unpublished PhD dissertation by Sunit Singh, 'Echoes of Freedom: Indian Radicals and the Socialist International, 1905–1920' (University of Chicago, 2018).

2.1 Front page of the *Ghadar* (issue of December 1916). Its masthead proclaims its deadly enmity to British rule and calls for armed rebellion against it, while the page gives the *kacha chittha* (balance sheet) of the Raj and counsels Indian labourers to press for their rights.

This does not include popular commemorations on Ghadar in East Punjab, where the movement and the figures associated with it have acquired an almost iconic status.

In some ways, the very first of histories of Ghadar were authored by the Raj. One official after the other was charged with producing reports on the movement. Later versions were authored by Ghadarites themselves. To these were added scholarly accounts. Given the range of this literature, it is difficult to synthesize the major themes through which Ghadar has been studied. Clearly, the movement has been of interest to scholars for varying reasons. For my part, I will not provide an exhaustive history of Ghadar. That, in any case, has been done comprehensively by other scholars. Instead, I am approaching Ghadar through the seminal role it performed in the development of an international anti-imperialist network that later blended in with the project of the Communist International.

Virtually all accounts agree that the genesis of this network lay in a story of migration and the experiences – harrowing and enlightening in equal measure – associated with being an outsider. By way of a background, British India had long been a centre of emigrants and itinerant groups headed elsewhere in the world.[11] Within the subcontinent, few regions were as integrated into global migratory flows as central tracts in the north-western province of Punjab. A key element in this flow from the Punjab was militaristic in nature. As the primary recruiting ground for the British Indian Army, tens of thousands of Punjabis had been deployed overseas as soldiers or as ex-servicemen employed in police forces from East Africa to South East Asia.[12] That figure would rise astronomically in the two World Wars, when millions across India, nearly half of them Punjabis, were mobilized for the war effort. The earliest recorded instance of this movement dates back to 1867, when 100 Sikh emigrants left for Hong Kong to bolster its nascent police force.[13] Tens and thousands of others – labourers, peasants, small traders, students – followed in their wake to far-flung regions around the world. The clear majority were driven by hopes of improving their economic conditions. This was particularly the case with central Punjab,

[11] In *A Hundred Horizons* Sugata Bose suggests a figure of thirty million from the 1830s to the 1930s. Of these, nearly twenty-four million returned to India (p. 73). See also Judith M. Brown, *Global South Asians: Introducing the Modern Diaspora* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[12] See for instance Thomas Metcalf, *Forging the Raj: Essays on British India in the Heyday of Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

[13] Darshan Singh Tatla, *The Sikh Diaspora: The Search for Statehood* (UCL Press, 1999), p. 48.

where increasingly fragmented landholdings combined with overseas military service, diasporic kinship networks, high population densities, structural changes in the colonial economy, and rural indebtedness all worked to create conditions for emigration.[14] Consequently, Jat Sikhs from central Punjab constituted the majority of emigrants travelling to the Far East, East Africa, and North America in search of better opportunities.

Punjabi emigration to North America picked up in the 1890s, and steadily gathered pace in the first decade of the twentieth century.[15] With rising immigration came its own sets of problems. In both Canada and the United States Indians were subject to official discriminatory policies designed to discourage their immigration and settlement. They also faced everyday racism and hostility from American and Canadian white workers. For instance, Sohan Singh Bhakna, one of the leading lights of the movement, recalled in an interview how children in the street called out 'Hello, Hindu Slave! Hello, Hindu Slave!' to Indians. To make matters worse, 'Hindi workers' – Hindi being a byword for Indians – were hated by white labourers on grounds of undercutting their wages. They were hated even more than other foreign workers, mainly Chinese and Japanese, who worked for even less than Indian labourers. And yet the hatred and attacks against them were not as pronounced as they were towards Indians. In both Canada and the United States, Indians were gradually subjected to discriminatory official policies that were designed to discourage their immigration and settlement.[16] The reason, Bhakna claimed, was that the Chinese,

[14] See for instance Puri, *Ghadar Movement*, pp. 11–15 and Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*, p. 18. These factors are mentioned in virtually all official and unofficial accounts of Punjabi migration, and the settlement and consequent radicalization of Indians in North America. They are also emphasized in biographical accounts of Ghadarites. See for example biographies of Sohan Singh Bhakna, one of the founders and leading lights of the Ghadar movement. While there are many to choose from, see in particular Sohan Singh Josh, *Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna: Life of the Founder of the Ghadar Party* (People's Publishing House, 1970) and the CPI pamphlet that was based on interviews with Bhakna: Randhir Singh, *Ghadar Heroes: Forgotten Story of the Punjab Revolutionaries 1914–1915* (People's Publishing House, 1945).

[15] Tatla, *Sikh Diaspora*, pp. 51–52.

[16] This was manifested most starkly in the notorious *Komagata Maru* affair. This episode constituted a defining moment for Indian radicalism in North America. It also featured heavily in Ghadar's memorialization and its many histories. Aside from being the subject of numerous popular and scholarly works, the *Komagata Maru* has also been the subject of at least one movie. The incident was triggered by a decision of the Canadian government to restrict the immigration of Indians into the country. Outraged at this unfair treatment, a ship named *Komagata Maru* was especially hired to transport Punjabi immigrants to Canada. The *Komagata Maru* sailed on a carefully planned route designed to exploit a loophole in the law barring Indian immigration. The ship docked at

Japanese, and other foreign labourers were supported by their sovereign governments, a privilege that Indians could not lay claim to. They were instead known as a subject and a conquered population. In that vein, he also recounted how Indians' American co-workers asked them whether India was inhabited by 300 million people or lambs. How else could they explain being colonized by the British? The reason for their inferior status in North America, then, was not difficult to discern. The answer, Bhakna said, was all around them. They only had to look around them to see that a 'slave can never attain respect and dignity in the world'.[17]

It goes without saying that Bhakna could have been selective in his recollections. He could also have embellished a few details. But his is merely one of many accounts, contemporaneous or otherwise, that spoke of visceral official and everyday racism against Indian migrants. Their experiences underscored the urgency of political mobilization and organization that would not only work for Indian immigrants in Canada and the United States but would also in due course resist an Empire that, for many, lay behind their predicaments. Class too served as a potent rallying cry. And when placed in a heady mix of anarchist, socialist, republican, and trade union activism, it lent further impetus to a growing movement within Indian immigrants in North America. Initially, political mobilization occurred through gurdwaras and societies such as the Khalsa Diwan Society that threaded 'communitarian' concerns with 'nationalist' ones.[18] Precisely what those concerns were – whether 'secular–nationalist' or 'communal–parochial'[19] – has been the subject of much historical debate. But that is not my concern here. Where there does

Vancouver in May 1914 but its passengers were not allowed to disembark. Instead, it was forced to sail back to Calcutta where the furious passengers got into a violent confrontation with the police leading to a number of deaths. See for instance Hugh Johnston, *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru: The Sikh Challenge to Canada's Colour Bar* (Oxford University Press, 1979) and Malwinderjit Singh Waraich and Gurdev Singh Sidhu (eds.), *Komagata Maru, A Challenge to Colonialism: Key Documents* (Unistar Books, 2005). For more recent scholarly accounts, see Anjali Gera Roy, *Imperialism and Sikh Migration: The Komagata Maru Incident* (Routledge, 2018); Renisa Mawani, *Across Oceans of Law: The Komagata Maru and Jurisdiction in the Time of Empire* (Duke University Press, 2018); Suchetana Chattopadhyay, *Voices of Komagata Maru: Imperial Surveillance and Workers from Punjab in Bengal* (Tulika Books, 2019); and Rita Kaur Dhamoon et al. (eds.), *Unmooring the Komagata Maru: Charting Colonial Trajectories* (University of British Columbia Press, 2019).

[17] Kruger Nachlass 63/442-4 (1965), 'Papers on the History of the Ghadar Party', *Antworten von Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna auf Fragen über die Geschichte und Entwicklung der Ghadr-Party*.

[18] Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*, pp. 18–20.

[19] Puri, *Ghadar Movement*, pp. 43–44.

seem to be consensus on is the key role played by Indian students and intellectuals coming from India or Europe to the west coast.

The most notable of these dissident intellectuals was Lala Hardayal. Said to be 'imbued with passionate Anglophobia',[20] Hardayal was one of the leading spirits behind the Ghadar movement. The official report on the movement, 'An Account of the Ghadar Conspiracy', authored in 1919 by F.C. Isemonger and J. Slattery, began its history of the Ghadar with a biography of Hardayal. Born in 1884, Hardayal obtained his education in Delhi and Lahore before proceeding to Oxford in 1905. Two years later, he quit Oxford to devote his life to what the report described as 'so-called national service'. Hardayal then got involved with political radicalism in London at the famed India House.[21] Eventually, he reached the west coast of the United States in 1911 after brief sojourns in Lahore, London, Paris, and La Martinique. In 1912, he was appointed Professor of Indian Philosophy and Sanskrit at Stanford University. Soon after, he resigned from that position too, and worked on mobilizing Indian immigrants and students. The 'Account' blamed Hardayal for 'incitement' and for 'seducing' ordinary Indians from 'honest work to the trade of a revolutionary'.[22] For another official inquiry, the reasons were even more obvious. 'With the high spirited and adventurous Sikhs', it claimed, 'the interval between thought and action is short. If captured by inflammatory appeals, they are prone to act with all possible celerity and in a fashion dangerous to the whole fabric of order and constitutional rule.'[23] In highlighting the role of Hardayal and other agents provocateurs, these reports predictably underplayed the scale of political discontent and mobilization among Indian immigrants that predated his arrival in the United States. In one speaking tour after the other, Hardayal found receptive audiences already in tune with his message of national liberation. Given the already fertile ground, Hardayal, along with other organizers, was able to launch the *Ghadar* in 1913.

[20] 'Sedition Committee 1918: Report' (Calcutta, 1918), p. 145.

[21] Hardayal's ideas and his attraction towards anarchism and other ideas are beyond the scope of this chapter. They have been covered more extensively, and richly, in Sunit Singh's dissertation. Also see Emily Brown's *Hardayal: Hindu Revolutionary and Rationalist* (University of Arizona Press, 1975); Benjamin Zachariah, 'A Long, Strange Trip: The Lives in Exile of Har Dayal', *South Asian History and Culture* 4, 4 (2013), 574–592, and Daniel Elam, 'Echoes of Ghadr: Lala Har Dayal and the Time of Anticolonialism', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 34, 1 (2014), 9–23.

[22] Isemonger and Slattery, *An Account of the Ghadar Conspiracy, 1913–1915*, p. 14. The remaining details are from the report's sections on Hardayal, pp. 1–3, 12–14, and 18–23.

[23] Sedition Committee Report, p. 161.

For Isemonger and Slattery, *Ghadar* 'amply fulfilled the worst anticipations' of the Empire. It

> was violently anti-British in nature, playing on every passion that it could possibly excite, preaching murder and mutiny in every sentence, and urging all Indians to go to India with the express intention of committing murder, causing revolution and expelling the British government by any means, and hold up to admiration every seditionist and murderer who had attained notoriety.[24]

The paper, together with publications like *Ghadar di Gunj* (Echoes of Mutiny, a collection of uncompromisingly radical poetry), *Nia Zamana* (New Era), *Ilan-i-Jang* (Declaration of War), and others, found a receptive audience in North America and beyond. It is important to emphasize the latter point, because the *Ghadar*, according to the report, was posted, amongst other places, to Vancouver, Manilla, Japan, Hong Kong, Shanghai, East Africa, Nairobi, Johannesburg, Singapore, Hankow, and Tientsin. In short, it was sent to 'every place where Indians were known to be residing', and not least to India itself.[25] In one year alone, as Bhakna put it, Ghadar accomplished something that other Indian nationalist and revolutionary groups had struggled to achieve.[26]

Before the movement got an opportunity to further consolidate itself, war broke out in Europe. For the Ghadar movement, this was an opportunity not to be missed. There could not be a better moment to launch their rebellion than while the Empire was distracted by the war. And so, despite its lack of preparation,[27] the party issued a call for Ghadarite volunteers to sail *en masse* to India and take up arms against the Raj. An untold number, possibly thousands, enthusiastically responded to the call. From the Americas and the Far East, Ghadarite revolutionaries set sail for India. By September 1914, the situation had become alarming enough for the government of India to introduce the 'Ingress into India Ordinance', which empowered the central and local governments to 'provide for the control of persons entering British India, whether by sea or by land, in order to protect the state from anything prejudicial to its safety, interests or tranquillity'. Other ordinances empowered civil and military authorities to restrict or prohibit the entry of any person to any area.[28] The prevailing wisdom dictated that any 'Indian returning from America or Canada, whether labourer, artisan or student must be regarded with the greatest suspicion as an active revolutionary, or at any rate as a sympathizer with the revolutionary party'.[29] There were, of

[24] Isemonger and Slattery, *An Account of the Ghadar Conspiracy, 1913–1915*, pp. 23–24.
[25] Ibid., pp. 27–29. [26] Bhakna, interview. [27] Ibid.
[28] Isemonger and Slattery, *An Account of the Ghadar Conspiracy, 1913–1915*, p. 81.
[29] Ibid., p. 72.

course, good reasons for the Raj to be worried. Returning revolutionaries and their local sympathizers conducted a spate of dacoities, murders, sabotage attempts and, most worryingly, a few successful attempts at provoking troop mutinies.[30] Luckily for the authorities, a tip-off alerted them of an uprising planned for February 1915 that would involve military regiments.[31]

Why did the rebellion fail? The reasons were complex and multifaceted. For many Ghadarites, spies were to blame.[32] Historians of the Ghadar have also advanced their interpretations. Official inquiries wrote that the revolutionaries had vastly overestimated the appeal of their message in their Punjabi heartlands.[33] Simply put, their Punjabi compatriots did not have similar experiences of alienation and political radicalization to the aspiring revolutionaries in the diaspora. Lack of organization and preparation, and a lackadaisical attitude towards secrecy, also thwarted their plans. But in assigning further reasons it was difficult for colonial officials to resist resorting to familiar stereotypes. Thus the Indian habit of 'regarding the ideal as the fact' also played a role in their defeat.[34] Read generously, this comment could also be interpreted as a gesture to the utopian revolutionary imagination. Whatever the reasons, the rebellion in the Punjab conclusively failed, even in Ghadar's estimation.

And yet Ghadar rose again in different guises. After the failure of their rebellion, Ghadarites continued their work apace. In doing so they were involved with other transnational networks such as Irish republicans, and, of greatest concern to the British, the hostile powers of Ottoman Turkey and Germany. Ghadar, for instance, was also part of what became known as the 'Hindu–German Conspiracy'. The conspiracy in question referred to Germany's efforts in cultivating and supporting revolutionary networks with the aim of carrying the war into British India. Other belligerents in the conflict sought to do the same to each other's empires. The British, for example, instigated the Arab Revolt against Ottoman Turkey. Turkey for its part declared *jihad* against the British Empire, partly with the hope of fomenting mutiny among Muslim

[30] The most significant of which was the mutiny of Indian troops in Singapore. For a scholarly treatment of the Singapore mutiny, see Gajendra Singh, *Between Self and Sepoy: The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), chapter 5.

[31] See the proceedings of the Lahore Conspiracy Case and Isemonger and Slattery, *An Account of the Ghadar Conspiracy, 1913–1915*.

[32] Expressed in the memorable phrase *mukhbir maara giya* (the spy wrecked it), quoted in Puri, *Ghadar Movement*, p. 5.

[33] Isemonger and Slattery, *An Account of the Ghadar Conspiracy, 1913–1915*, p. 135.

[34] Ibid., p. 67.

sepoys in the British Indian Army.[35] India and Indian revolutionaries, then, were at the centre of Great Power intrigues. Thus, shortly after the outbreak of war, the German Foreign Office had gathered Indian revolutionaries in Berlin. They became known as the Berlin India Committee (BIC). Along with the omnipresent Hardayal – who had escaped the United States in 1914 to avoid arrest and prosecution – one of the committee's most prominent members was Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, alias Chatto, brother of Sarojini Naidu, and a leading figure in the overseas revolutionary movement.[36] Along with publishing propaganda literature, the BIC also liaised with the German government in launching ambitious schemes aimed at smuggling arms and ammunition to revolutionary groups in India and invading India through the Burmese frontier. Participating in these schemes were Ghadarites from North America and the Far East. None of these schemes, or others – including equally ambitious plans for fomenting unrest along the Afghan–Indian border and working with Pan-Islamists – came to pass.[37] Nevertheless, they did indicate how the war was viewed as an opportune moment by Indian revolutionaries, including the Ghadar.

Back in the United States, the alleged involvement of Ghadar in the Indo-German Conspiracy resulted in the 'Hindu–German Conspiracy' case of 1917, also known as the San Francisco Conspiracy Case. Instituted in San Francisco by the United States government, the case tried thirty-five persons, seventeen of them Indians, five Americans, four 'German–Americans', and nine German citizens, including former consular officials. They were charged with violating the neutrality of the United States prior to its declaration of war against Germany that year. The case was also, in part, an outcome of the repeated representations of the British Foreign Office to the United States to act against the Ghadar.[38] Lasting from November 1917 to April 1918, the trial extensively deliberated over the ambitious schemes hatched between

[35] In consort with Germany, of course. See Franziska Roy, Heike Liebau, and Ravi Ahuja (eds.), *When the War Began, We Heard of Several Things: Prisoners of War in First World War Germany* (Social Science Press, 2011).

[36] For a biographical account of Chatto, see Nirode K. Barooah, *Chatto: The Life and Times of an Indian Anti-Imperialist in Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

[37] The Sedition Committee Report lists these schemes in detail: pp. 119–125, 173–179. Maia Ramnath also provides a useful overview of them in *Haj to Utopia*, pp. 70–94.

[38] That process, however, was not without its problems. Time and again, the British government was frustrated by what they perceived to be an inexplicable reluctance of the United States government to act against the party. See IOR/L/P&J/12/148, 'Anglo Soviet Relations: Communist Propaganda in India; Relationship between the Comintern and the Ghadr Party Jul 1933–Jan 1935' and the discussions on the history of the Ghadar Party. Also of interest: IOR/P&J/(S) 299 1934 'Indian Seditious Activities in the US', p. 63. For details of British intelligence operations and their engagements with their US

the Ghadar, Indian revolutionary circuits in Europe, and the German Reich.[39] In a foregone conclusion, the accused were found guilty and sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment and fines.[40] The trial also became known for the explosive courtroom murder of Ram Chandra, who had led the Ghadar after the departure of Hardayal to Europe. Chandra had been accused by a rival faction within the party of authoritarianism, betrayal, and embezzlement of party funds. His was the highest-profile assassination of several such incidents that targeted alleged 'traitors'.[41]

The trial dealt a significant blow to the party. For Harish Puri and other commentators, it also marked the end of Ghadar's purported first phase. 'Hindustan Ghadar 2.0' was a depleted, and yet reinvigorated, radical faction of the Ghadar that turned towards the Soviet Union.[42] Its pioneer, Santokh Singh, was sentenced by the San Francisco trial court to twenty-one months.[43] While Ghadar fell into retreat, Santokh Singh was learning about Bolshevism and the Revolution in prison. After his early release in 1919, he took over as the party's general secretary, and, after a brief period of reorganization, left for the Soviet Union along with his comrade in arms, Rattan Singh. While their journeys and brief biographies are covered in the following chapters, it is sufficient for now to note that the party's turn to communism and the Soviet Union was not unusual. Revolutionary groups around the world were gravitating towards the Soviet Union for its seemingly unqualified support for national liberation struggles against European imperialisms. In that sense, there was little to differentiate Ghadar 2.0 from its first phase. Both were equally uncompromising in their resistance to the Raj and in their unapologetic collaboration with the enemies of British imperialism.

counterparts, see Matthew Erin Plowman, 'The British Intelligence Station in San Francisco during the First World War', *Journal of Intelligence History* 12, 1 (2013), 1–20. Also of interest is Richard J. Popplewell's *Intelligence and Imperial Defence: British Intelligence and the Defence of the Indian Empire, 1904–1924* (Psychology Press, 1995), in particular chapter 10.

[39] For the voluminous proceedings of the case, see the San Francisco Conspiracy Case Papers.

[40] Isemonger and Slattery, *An Account of the Ghadar Conspiracy, 1913–1915*, Appendix R.

[41] This, however, was not the only time Ghadarites came under official scrutiny in the United States. As late as 1953, the California Senate's 'Fact Finding Committee of Un-American Activities' was tasked with the responsibility of unmasking 'how a racial minority group in California can be used as cover for espionage and subversive political activities'. The activities in question were the Ghadar's 'fanatical' anti-British and communist politics. Report in Gurharpal Singh Collection, University of Warwick, Box 1, No. 4, 'Seventh Report, Un-American activities in California, 1953'.

[42] Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*, pp. 136–142 and Puri, *Ghadar Movement*, pp. 235–242.

[43] Isemonger and Slattery, *An Account of the Ghadar Conspiracy, 1913–1915*, Appendix R.

And yet, the revived, reinvigorated, radical Ghadar went further in its politics by actively participating in the global project of Communist Internationalism – a story that that is covered in fuller detail in the following chapters.

Meanwhile, the activities of Ghadarites in the United States continued apace. New publications such as the *Independent Hindustan* and the *United States of India* continued propagating Ghadar's message. Beyond Ghadar, though, the political activities of North American Indian immigrants continued through other platforms. During the Akali movement in Punjab (1920–25), for instance, a number of Sikh organizations were founded in North America and elsewhere with the aim of supporting the struggle from afar. Some predated the movement and indeed Ghadar itself, and supported other Sikh movements alongside the Akalis. A key element of their support was financial. Indeed, the Punjabi diaspora was instrumental in channelling substantial funds to assorted nationalist, communitarian, revolutionary, and communist groups in the Punjab. In North America, for instance, aside from the Ghadar Party, were the Pacific Coast Khalsa Diwan Society, Malwa Sudharak Society, Sikh American Doada Educational Society, and the Sons of Bharat, each of which was either founded in or had a branch in California. In Vancouver alone there were three societies: the Canadian American Press Society of the Doaba, the Khalsa Diwan Society, and the Hindustani Young Men's Association. Most had branches in the Punjab as well. To take but one example from this list, the Malwa Sudharak Society, founded in 1922 during the height of the Akali movement, and with branches in the United States, Canada, and Punjab, was founded with an alleged objective of 'starting a newspaper in India for the purpose of anti-government propaganda'. To that end, it established and financed a newspaper published in Amritsar, the *Asli Qaumi Dard*, labelled a 'consistently anti-Government production' by the police.[44] Other societies functioned in similar ways. The sheer number of these organizations, often short-lived and split into factions, gave a sense of a thriving political culture within the Punjabi and Indian immigrant community. While these organizations were divided along regional, political and other lines, together they posed a threat to imperial order in the Punjab through their substantial bankrolling and support of political radicalism of varying ideological shades.

It hardly needs emphasizing that this was not merely a Punjab-centric story. While Ghadar was arguably the most prominent network operating

[44] Punjab Police Secret Abstracts of Intelligence (PPSAI) 1927, Simla, 2 July, No. 25, 'Note on Sikh Revolutionary or Anti-government Societies Abroad', pp. 245–246.

in the Indian diaspora, there were other radical groups dispersed across the globe. Before Ghadar was founded, London was the centre for Indian radicals. The most distinguished of them, Shyamji Krishnavarma, from Kathiawar in western India, founded the India Home Rule Society and a journal called the *Indian Sociologist* in 1905. With a dictum by Herbert Spencer crowning its masthead, the paper declared itself to be 'organ of freedom, and of political, social, and religious reform'. Krishnavarma also founded the India House, which was portrayed as a 'hostel' for Indian students. It was instead a 'centre of sedition' and a cultivating ground for revolutionaries, Hardayal included. Other famous alumni included Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, later founder of Hindutva, and Madan Lal Dhingra, assassin of William Curzon of the India Office and the first 'martyr' of the revolutionary movement abroad.[45] Curzon's assassination in 1909 also led to the closing of the India House, whereupon the activities of revolutionary circles moved to Paris. Similarly, Berlin hosted the Berlin Indian Committee. There were other networks too, located periodically in Paris, Geneva, Tokyo, New York, Kabul, and other places. Crucially, these networks overlapped with each other, with revolutionaries frequently moving from one centre to another. Hardayal, for instance, began his political career with the India House before founding the Ghadar and later moving to Berlin to join the BIC. Far from unusual, his movements were in keeping with the times, when certain spaces around the world acted as conduits for political activism.

The reach and spread of these networks were also necessitated by the global reality of empire. India had long been used in service of the British Empire. Its soldiers were deployed in theatres far removed from the subcontinent. For those reasons, Indian revolutionaries also actively sought to combat the Raj in sites far away from India itself. One notable example of this comes from the Ghadar Party's activism in China. And one episode in particular is a powerful illustration of how the network operated and how it negotiated its aim of national liberation with the ethos of internationalism.

The episode in question revolved around a pamphlet that came to the notice of the imperial authorities in 1927. Titled a 'Protest against British Imperialism in China by the Hindustan Ghadr (India's National) Party', the leaflet protested the arrest of two Ghadarites, one allegedly a citizen

[45] Sedition Committee Report, pp. 5–8. On Krishnavarma, see Harald Fischer-Tiné, *Sanskrit, Sociology and Anti-Imperial Struggle: The Life of Shyamji Krishnavarma (1857–1930)* (Routledge India, 2008); on Sarvakar, see Vinayak Chaturvedi, 'A Revolutionary's Biography: The Case of V.D. Savarkar', *Postcolonial Studies* 16, 2 (2013), 124–139.

of China, by the British in Chinese territory. The men were arrested and convicted for 'being in possession of seditious literature and for inciting disaffection among the King's subjects'.[46] The subjects in question were Indian, presumably Punjabi, troops and police posted in Shanghai.[47] The city had long hosted thousands of Indians, with many serving as soldiers and policemen charged with defending the city's International Settlement.[48] 'Tampering' with the loyalty of Punjabi troops, of course, had been a favoured tactic in the Ghadar playbook. To that end, the arrested men had taken out a paper called the *Hindustan Ghadar Dhandora*. Their activism was in keeping with Ghadar's support for China's struggle against imperialism. In another resolution, the party had endorsed the programme adopted by the Kuomintang and condemned the use of Indians by the British in suppressing the nationalist movement in China.[49] The leaflet thus appealed to the Chinese people, and Marshal Chiang Kai Shek in particular, to protest the 'atrocious action of the British authorities' in arresting those who were 'helping the cause of China's freedom'. More significantly, the leaflet also declared that

> India's nationalists, all over the world, in co-operation with the oppressed humanity, are interested in the destruction of British Imperialism. They know full well that unless it is destroyed, there can be no peace on the face of this earth; there can be no freedom for India and other enslaved countries.
>
> It was Lincoln who said that there cannot be such a thing as a nation half free and half slave. What was true of one country then, is true of all humanity today. Due to modern means of communication, mankind is functioning as one organism. Any one part of this organism cannot grow healthy while other parts are paralysed and diseased. A large part of humanity is suffering under the bondage of slavery on account of British Imperialism. This condition must be removed.
>
> A small number of Englishmen have constituted themselves into the so-called British Empire. They have forced their will by fair and foul means upon one-third of mankind, and extracted the very life of the people in subjected countries.
>
> The gold acquired by unfair means from suffering mankind is being used to manufacture dreadnoughts, gas, explosives, and other death-dealing devices for the wholesale destruction of Europe as well as Asia. The late war is a living example of this British vandalism in which the cream of western civilization was destroyed.

[46] A.K. Mukhopadhyaya, *India and Communism: Secret British Documents* (reprint of *India and Communism*, 1935), p. 226.
[47] PPSAI 1927, Simla, 2 July, No. 25, 'Note on Sikh Revolutionary …', p. 247.
[48] For an excellent *longue durée* overview of Shanghai's history as a treaty port and centre of American and European interests, see Marie-Claire Bergere, *Shanghai: China's Gateway to Modernity* (Stanford University Press, 2009).
[49] PPSAI 1927, Simla, 2 July, No. 25, 'Note on Sikh Revolutionary …', p. 246.

To protect this highly destructive and savage British Empire, every able-bodied Englishman is conscripted against his will. Thus, even the best element in England is destroyed, and only a few politicians are left free to play with human lives like pawns on a chess board.

It is the duty of every liberty loving person to help destroy British Imperialism which is the real enemy of human freedom and world peace.[50]

Decades after this leaflet was issued, Sohan Singh Bhakna had claimed in an interview that every 'soldier' of the Ghadar was expected to assist and participate in national liberation struggles around the world.[51] This leaflet, along with many other statements in Ghadar publications, would certainly seem to back up this view. Alongside endorsing China's struggle, Ghadar was also vocal in lending its support and sympathy to other movements, most notably the Irish liberation struggle, and, as this leaflet suggests, this expression of sympathy also extended to ordinary British people who were also considered pawns of the British Empire. For the most part, though, these expressions of solidarity and support were rhetorical in nature. When they materialized in schemes, much like the Shanghai episode, they mostly failed. Other schemes, fantastical in their very conception, like Raja Mahendra Pratap's disastrous expedition across Tibet, were always destined for failure.[52] Still, rhetorical or otherwise, these expressions of support underscored a political ethic that underlined much of Ghadar's politics. For many, 'communist' or not, the struggle for liberation was inextricably tied to a global struggle against European imperialism. Most notably, this struggle was also inflected by class. In that sense, they had arguably come further in their internationalism than the Ghadar of 1914. Along the way, they had also been deeply influenced by the Bolshevik Revolution and its cry of Communist Internationalism that, as a basic political ethic, internationalized liberation struggles around the world. All such struggles were linked together. In that sense, at least, Ghadar became an appropriate metaphor for the interwar impulse of internationalism that linked one disparate struggle with another.

On the Seas

If diasporic and dissident spaces dotted across the world provided routes into political radicalism and later communism, the seas were yet another

[50] PPSAI 1927, Simla, 13 August, Departmental Notice No. 43, p. 320.
[51] Bhakna, Interview, Horst Kruger Nachlass, Zentrum Moderner Orient.
[52] As one of the more intriguing figures in these networks, Raja Mahendra Pratap has inspired much (bemused) commentary in official sources. For a scholarly treatment of his politics – and his famed Tibetan expedition – see Carolien Stolte, '"Enough of the Great Napoleons!" Raja Mahendra Pratap's Pan-Asian Projects (1929–1939)', *Modern Asian Studies* 46, 2 (2012), 403–423.

medium through which Indians entered seditious politics. As the case of Ghadar exemplified, the very *act* of travelling could be a distinctly politicizing experience. Speaking of this experience, colonial officials charged with investigating Ghadar had written that 'the deterioration of the native of India in the Far East is extraordinarily rapid, even under strict discipline'.[53] While directed at Ghadar in the Far East and Americas, their comment could equally be extended to include itinerant groups in general. Mobility could be seditious and was seen as such by the imperial machinery. For that reason, networks of students, intellectuals, labourers, traders, migrants, and even pilgrims were viewed with suspicion by colonial authorities. This anxiety only grew over the first two decades of the twentieth century, as Indian and other anti-colonial revolutionary parties proliferated across the globe. Of greater concern, though, were the numerous actual and suspected attempts by the Soviets to infiltrate itinerant networks, no matter how obscure or odd. From pilgrims and lascars to Bukharan carpet traders and circus performers,[54] such networks were the primary means through which seditious (read: revolutionary) publications, arms and ammunition, and communists and revolutionaries made their way into India. To give but one example, colonial officials had repeatedly expressed their concern regarding Muslim pilgrimage networks to Mesopotamia and the Hejaz owing to the threat posed by Pan-Islamism and communism. In a report issued in 1926, for instance, it was claimed that the Soviet Union had established a consulate in Jeddah with the express purpose of disseminating communist propaganda among pilgrims arriving for the annual pilgrimage of Hajj from across the Muslim world. More specifically, the consulate was suspected of using '*mutawwifs* and their agents or *wakils* as one of the channels through which subversive propaganda is passed into India'.[55] And these, it should be emphasized, were simply a few among many such groups that were vulnerable to infiltration by revolutionary groups, not least by the Soviet Union.

By far the largest of these groups, and thereby of greatest concern, were the thousands of Indian lascars serving in shipping vessels around the world. Lascars were 'seamen', or, to be more precise, 'afloat industrial labour', working for British and other merchant shipping lines that

[53] Isemonger and Slattery, *An Account of the Ghadar Conspiracy, 1913–1915*, p. 72.
[54] PPSAI 1926–27, Departmental Notices.
[55] *Mutawwifs* were agents who assisted pilgrims in their logistical arrangements and performance of religious duties. PPSAI 1927, Lahore, 8 January, No. 1, Look Out Notice, p. 15. Also see PPSAI 1926, Lahore, 17 April, No. 16, Department Notice No. 14, p. 149.

traversed the globe.[56] While lascars had served on British maritime vessels since the seventeenth century,[57] in the revolutionary ferment of the twentieth century, the tens of thousands of lascars posed a distant but credible threat to the British Empire. At any one time, Indian lascars were present in virtually all the major shipping ports in Europe, North America and the Far East – ports that were also the hotbed of trade union, anarchist, socialist, and communist activism. Along with the threat posed by these radical geographical nodes, the 'lascar system', as it became to be known, served as a crucial conduit through which 'agitators', propaganda material, and arms were smuggled into an India subject to stifling censorship regulations and repressive legislation related to the entry of suspect individuals and materials. In a world occupied by a fear of increasing political radicalism, the unparalleled mobility of lascars (even under strict restrictions) posed a significant threat to states and empires. By the same token, it also worked as an unparalleled asset for revolutionary networks and the Soviets. Of greater interest, however, is how the 'lascar system'[58] also served as a conduit through which individuals could be politically radicalized. In other words, the lascar circuit provided yet another instance of how travelling could forge a distinct and self-consciously political subject. Travelling, then, could be a distinctly political act, an ethic even. And it was recognized as such by the colonial authorities.

While there are hardly any accounts of lascars that provide an insight into the multilayered trajectories to political radicalism, there is one very

[56] The term used by Vivek Bald in his vivid descriptions of lascar lives in *Bengali Harlem and the Lost Histories of South Asian America* (Harvard University Press, 2013). The term 'lascar' was derived from the Persian word *lashkar* (army). From the eighteenth century onwards, 'lascar' was used by British and other European shipping circuits as a generic term for South Asian sailors. Another term, and one that was preferred by the sailors themselves, was *jehazis* (ship people). See Ravi Ahuja, 'Subaltern Networks under British Imperialism: Exploring the Case of South Asian Maritime Labour (c. 1890–1947)', in Jan-Georg Deutsch and Brigitte Reinwald (eds.), *Space on the Move: Transformations of the Indian Ocean Seascape in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century* (Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2002), p. 40. Ahuja's account also serves as an excellent introduction to lascar networks. Another useful piece is Gopalan Balachandran, 'Searching for the *Sardar*: The State, Pre-Capitalist Institutions and Human Agency in the Maritime Labour Market in Calcutta, 1880–1935', in Burton Stein and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (eds.), *Institutions and Economic Change in South Asia* (Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 206–306. Also see Frank Broeze, 'The Muscles of Empire: Indian Seamen and the Raj, 1919–1939', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 18, 1 (1981), 43–67.

[57] Michael Fisher, 'Working across the Seas: Indian Maritime Labourers in India, Britain and in Between, 1600–1857', *International Review of Social History* 51 (2006), Supplement, 21–45 (26).

[58] While labour historians refer to the 'lascar system' or 'lascar network' as a form of labour organization, imperial officials frequently used it in the interwar period to refer to networks through which arms, banned literature, and potential revolutionaries circulated.

important exception: the memoirs of 'Dada' Amir Haider Khan. A lascar and a revolutionary, Dada's accounts provide us with the best-known and meticulously self-documented journey into political radicalism. In doing so, his writing also provides a glimpse into a world marked by political and social maelstroms. It was this world that an untold number of Indians found themselves negotiating. Born in a small village in northwest Punjab around 1900, Dada was raised in a community that barely managed to eke out an existence in the surrounding rocky and hilly landscape. With his father having died while he was still an infant, Dada spent his childhood largely on the run from his stepfather. From the very beginning, his life was profoundly tied with the transformative changes brought about by empire. His brothers, along with other men in the extended family, either served in the British Indian Army or worked in cities as far away as Calcutta and Bombay. The little formal education he obtained came through a nearby Urdu primary school and the local *mullah* (priest). After brief forays to Peshawar and Calcutta and an unsuccessful attempt at enlisting in the Army – he was deemed too young for military service – Dada ran away, this time for good, travelling without a ticket from Rawalpindi to Bombay where his brothers and *mama* (uncle) had found work on ships.[59]

Bombay, along with Calcutta, had long been a centre for inland migrants looking for work on maritime vessels. Most recruited on ships were from either from North India – particularly the Punjab – or Bengal. Over the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the supply of labourers destined for maritime vessels increased such that by 1914 the number of lascars employed on British vessels alone stood at approximately 52,000.[60] This did not include lascars employed on other European or American merchant vessels. Over this period, and indeed after it, there were significant changes in working conditions, terms of employment, patterns of recruitment, unionization, and so on.[61] These changes included the transformation of the shipping vessel into an industrial workspace stratified by race, language, labour function, ethnicity, and even caste and religion. To give but one example, the task of feeding

[59] Hasan N. Gardezi (ed.), *Chains to Lose: Life and Struggles of a Revolutionary, Memoirs of Dada Amir Haider Khan* (Pakistan Study Center, 2007), chapter 1.

[60] Ravi Ahuja, 'Subaltern Networks under British Imperialism' and 'Networks of Subordination–Networks of the Subordinated: The Case of South Asian Maritime Labour under British Imperialism (c. 1890–1947)', in Harald Fischer-Tine and Ashwini Tambe (eds.), *Spaces of Disorder in the Indian Ocean Region* (Routledge, 2008), pp. 13–48.

[61] Broeze, 'The Muscles of Empire' and Balachandran, 'Conflicts in the International Maritime Labour Market'.

coal to the ever-ravenous boilers of steamships fell to Indian crews. In contrast to their white counterparts, Indian were thought to be better equipped to withstand the frequently unbearable temperatures of the engine rooms. Nor were Indian crews granted the same protections and rights as their white, European, counterparts. They were contracted under specially designated 'Asiatic articles' that allowed British companies to pay them substantially reduced wages, feed them low-quality food, and house them in excessively cramped quarters. Meanwhile, they had to negotiate their hiring through Indian middlemen under no regulatory oversight, called *serangs*, who claimed a part of their wages at both the beginning and end of their contracts. With no right to compensation in the event of death or injury, or the right to end their contract under any circumstances, Indian labourers constituted an oppressed, but essential, workforce in global maritime trade.[62]

By the time Dada reached Bombay in 1914, the Great War was already under way and the port city was undergoing rapid transformation. Ships had been requisitioned for military service and lascars were in short supply. Shortly after he arrived, Dada managed to find employment on board the SS *Franz Ferdinand*, a captured Austro-Hungarian ship converted into a military transport vessel for carrying troops, material, and horses to Mesopotamia.[63] After serving a year on board the ship in Basra, during which he witnessed the British–Indian war effort against Turkish forces, Dada worked on one vessel after another for the next eight years. In that long, unforgiving, but all-too-enlightening period, Dada sailed across the world and frequented major port cities in Europe, the Americas and the Far East. In due course, he also spent a significant amount of time in the United States. His recollections are a powerful testimony of the difficult working conditions and racism faced by Indian seamen. They also provide a fascinating window into the vibrancy, energy, and politics of wartime ports in Europe and the United States, and paint a rich and sensitive portrait of seafaring lives. More importantly, though, Dada's testimony is also an account of a coming of age. Not only did he grow into adulthood but he also experienced some of the most formative encounters of his life – encounters that were painful and educational in equal measure.

One of the first lessons Dada learnt was of racism. Time and again, his account reveals a world that was racially marked. His was also a world structured on class exploitation. Those markers were at work on ship decks as much as they were in European and North American ports, as recorded in one account after another. At one point, in speaking about the

[62] Bald, *Bengali Harlem*, pp. 102–105. Also see Gardezi, *Chains to Lose*, p. 123.
[63] Gardezi, *Chains to Lose*, p. 74.

'wretched conditions' of Indian crews, Dada told of a 'Negro man' who refused food and accommodation meant for Indians. In response, he was given separate quarters and food from the European kitchen, which was yet another indication of the lowly position of Indians. After all, 'even a man whose ancestors had been enslaved a generation or two ago had developed tastes and modes of living higher than ours, and we, despite our ancient civilization were considered beneath his dignity'.[64] Along with giving a sense of how Dada understood his place in the world, this passage also betrayed his own disparaging view of African Americans. It was a view he was candid enough to admit. The racial attitudes and sensibilities of the Jim Crow United States had had their impact on him as well.[65] At the same time, Dada's encounters were also instrumental in splintering this racially inflected world. Recalling a trip to Buenos Aires, for instance, he writes of his surprise at meeting young, attractive, educated women, speaking several languages, who had come from Europe to work as prostitutes. Presumably, they could have found 'good homes or honorable places' back in their own countries.[66] While he did not mention it explicitly, it is hard to escape the sense that such encounters went some way in deconstructing ingrained beliefs in European racial superiority.[67] They were also instrumental for revealing in all its ugliness a world marked by class inequity and oppression of women. Indeed, one of the most striking aspects of Dada's testimony is his forthright, and yet frequently sympathetic, accounts of encounters with prostitutes.

Dada's stay and preoccupations in the United States were formative to his political thinking. New York in particular had been very important to him, as it was there that he was introduced to Indian anti-imperial networks. In due course, he met various personalities associated with the Indian freedom struggle, including representatives of the Ghadar Party and Agnes Smedley, founder of the Friends of Freedom for India.[68]

[64] Ibid., p. 123. [65] Ibid., p. 158. [66] Ibid., p. 184.

[67] Dada was not the only person who might have re-evaluated a racially normalized world in this way. The government of India, for example, was well aware of how white prostitutes would be viewed by their subjects. 'Foreign' prostitution was banned in Indian cantonments for reasons of racial and imperial prestige. For colonial officials, the 'degradation' of white women through prostitution would degrade and humiliate British imperial power. See Janaki Nair, 'Imperial Reason, National Honour and New Patriarchal Compacts in Early Twentieth-Century India', *History Workshop Journal* 66, 1 (2008), 208–226 and Stephen Legg's wide-ranging study *Prostitution and the Ends of Empire: Scale, Governmentalities, and Interwar India* (Duke University Press, 2014).

[68] Gardezi, *Chains to Lose*, pp. 233–247. The American journalist, writer, and revolutionary Agnes Smedley was one of the most prominent activists working for India's freedom in the interwar period. Among her considerable collection of writings, see her (semi-autobiographical) novel, *Daughter of Earth* (1929). Also see Janice MacKinnon and Stephen MacKinnon, *Agnes Smedley: The Life and Times of an American Radical*

These engagements only added to his sense of outrage at the crimes of British imperial rule and pushed him further into anti-colonial politics. His experiences of racial discrimination were not just personal: he had also witnessed the conditions of Indians elsewhere in the world. On a stop at Port of Spain, Trinidad, for example, he saw the conditions of indentured labourers of Indian descent, a sight that opened his 'eyes to the treachery and criminality of the British ruling class against the people of our country in foreign lands'.[69] Becoming ever more involved in anti-imperial circuits, Dada approached the Ghadar Party on the eve of a trip in 1920. He was given Ghadar literature in Urdu, Gurumukhi, and Hindi along with the Friends of Freedom for India propaganda material by Taraknath Das. He was also given two pistols. All were to be passed on to 'worthy' Indians elsewhere in the world.[70]

These exchanges were usual for the times. As mentioned, this was one way in which seditious materials, arms and ammunition circulated around the world, and not least to India itself. This was where the lascar system posed a unique threat to India. It was not simply that lascars could be involved in political radicalism; it was also that the system could be infiltrated by revolutionaries 'posing' as lascars. Consider, for instance, the following excerpt from a police report:

> One Kanshi Ram, son of Devi Chand, of Jalal village, Gujranwala district, arrived in Bombay from Liverpool on the 31st of December 1925, by the *SS Trafford Hall*, on which he served as a seaman. The Shipping Master, Bombay, described him as a seaman of an unusual type who had given a certain amount of trouble on board, and he was found by the Customs Authorities at Bombay to be in possession of literature of a decidedly anti-British nature.
>
> According to his own statement, Kanshi Ram matriculated at the Punjab University in 1916 and after doing various odd jobs … proceeded to America … There he claims to have earned sufficient funds to keep himself while obtaining degrees in Law and Oratory, as well as his M.A.
>
> Reports received from abroad show that in March 1925 this man signed on at New York as a member of the crew of the SS *City of Shanghai* by which ship he travelled to Liverpool via Australia, under the assumed name of Abdul Rashid. He informed a fellow seaman that he had gone to America about 5 years before to work for the independence of India, but that, in view of the failure of the movements started by Messrs. Gandhi and Das, he had decided to return to India to start a new agitation. He is further alleged to have displayed two revolvers and to have claimed that he could arrange for the dispatch of arms and ammunition from America.[71]

(University of California Press, 1988) for a comprehensive biographical overview of Smedley's life and politics.

[69] Gardezi, *Chains to Lose*, p. 227. [70] Ibid., p. 246.

[71] PPSAI 1926, Lahore, 27 March, No. 26, 'Look Out Notice', p. 119.

This was simply one way in which lascars, whether genuine or not, were involved. If lascars, or those 'posing' as such, were carriers of prohibited material, they were also carriers of ideas. Nor was this the only conduit with which the authorities were concerned. Of equal, if not greater, concern, were seamen's clubs in European and North American ports that were suspected to be fronts for Bolshevik and revolutionary activities. Some were also centres to which Indian revolutionaries gravitated. An interrogation report of a lascar illustrates this well:

> During our stay at Hamburg for about 8 or 10 days, after 2 or three days Abid Husain and a shop keeper of Hamburg came to our ship … In the afternoon, I came to learn from Abid Husain that a meeting of the seamen would be held … The meeting was held in two ground floor rooms of a big pucca building. These two buildings were occupied by a Club known as Bolshevik Club. There were sitting accommodation of 50 or 60 persons. There were 50 or 60 chairs and three tables. I also saw newspapers, books, registers arranged in the form of a Library.[72]

This report was one of many that were produced by the Empire. Along with providing a glimpse into the politically charged world of ports, such reports also reveal how the entirety of the imperial machinery, from the Secretary of State for India in London to lowly *serangs* on shipping vessels, were focused on countering the threat of lascar radicalism. These measures included port and policing authorities in India and elsewhere, British consular officials, trade and commerce boards, and owners of shipping companies. In 1923, for instance, the India Office wrote to Lord Inchcape, owner of Peninsular and Oriental (P&O), which operated a near-monopoly of British mercantile trade to and from India. The India Office asked Inchcape to warn his captains of the threat posed by Continental ports to his Indian crews. In response, Inchcape assured the India Office that we would prevent his 'lascar crews from getting contaminated'. He also issued a letter to his captains informing them of a generic conspiracy to further 'Ghandianism [*sic*] propaganda' with an aim of 'raising an agitation – communistic and dangerous – amongst our Indian crews'. The letter went on to state that 'communistic clubs' had been founded in 'Antwerp, Hamburg and other places' where native seamen were invited 'with the object of instilling into their minds revolutionary and seditious ideas'. Given this, captains were instructed to prevent lascars and firemen from visiting these clubs. They were also asked to keep a careful eye on the men they signed on and to treat their Indian crews with a 'kindly disposition', presumably to give them less of a

[72] IOR/L/P&J/12/52, 'Conveyance of Seditious Literature to India – Correspondence with Shipping Companies', 'Note on 'Indian Communist Party', September 1923, p. 2.

reason to flirt with revolutionary and seditious ideas.[73] This ostensible kindness was further underscored by certain sections within the imperial machinery (in this case, the Bombay government), which argued that 'shipping companies should treat their lascar seamen so well, in all particulars, that they are immune to infection'.[74] Underpinning this line of thinking was a distinctly colonial view of lascars. As another report put it, 'the ignorance of the Lascar will be likely to make him an easier prey than most'.[75]

However, it was precisely his ignorance that was 'unlikely to make him into a really useful agent'.[76] This was where a bureaucracy was woefully unequipped to have a sense of lascar worlds – worlds that could propel lascars to political radicalism. And this is where Dada's remarkable journeys and memoirs become even more significant. His experiences of racial discrimination and class oppression had been instrumental in his own political education and activism. He departed from New York in 1920 not simply as a lascar, but as an activist with a political calling. He distributed his literature to select Indians, mostly fellow Punjabis, in Panama, Tokyo, and Shanghai. In Shanghai, he must have inadvertently met a police informer, for soon after his arrival in Hong Kong his ship was raided by policemen looking for a suspected revolutionary on board. In the ensuing commotion, Dada was arrested and detained, but only to be released soon after following the intercession of his sympathetic captain and the local US consul. He was fortunate in that he was employed on an American vessel and that nothing objectionable was found in his belongings (his contraband had been thrown overboard by a fellow seaman during the raid). Thereafter, Dada proceeded on his journey through the Suez Canal and European ports back to the United States in 1921. Shortly after he arrived back in New York, he signed up with the 'Wobblies', otherwise known as the Industrial Workers of the World. He also became a naturalized US citizen. A year after, he turned his back on a seafaring life following an altercation with a 'prejudiced engineer' on a vessel dominated by southern white men. He had finally had enough of visceral racism.[77]

His subsequent life was as eventful as his eight years as a seafarer. Along with working in various jobs, he also went to aviation school and learnt to fly. He had long been fascinated by planes and looked at aviation as a means of employment and as a way of knowing the world. But there

[73] IOR/L/P&J/12/52, J&P (S) 8650/23, correspondence dated 22 and 27 September 1923.
[74] NAI/Home (Political), 372/I 1924, 'Note by Cecil Kaye', dated 7 September 1923, p. 4.
[75] NAI/Home (Political) 'Note by Cecil Kaye', p. 5. [76] Ibid.
[77] Gardezi, *Chains to Lose*, pp. 249–354.

were political reasons too. Someday, Dada reasoned, flying might come in use for helping India's liberation struggle 'from outside through the air by defying the British authorities who had isolated India from the outside world and closed it like a jail'.[78] Years later, this sounded naïve, romantic, and overly adventurous to Dada. Nevertheless, this image of a hermetically sealed and imprisoned India could perhaps have been most obvious to a lascar who had witnessed the disjuncture between the world beyond and India itself.

More importantly, Dada increasingly gravitated towards communism in these years. Eventually landing up in Detroit in 1925, he attended local YMCA meetings organized by Indians protesting the killings of Chinese strikers at the hands of the British Indian police. Ashamed at the involvement of his fellow Punjabis in the massacre, an enraged Dada rashly offered his services as a qualified pilot to a Chinese student leader. This was his impulsive contribution to the Chinese struggle against the British Empire. His hastily sketched schemes aside, Dada also engaged with other circuits in the city. Amongst other things, Detroit introduced him to African-American political activism. It also brought him in touch with the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA), then operating under the name of the 'Workers Party'. In one meeting held for Shanghai, he heard an American communist making a case for the Communist International as a unifier of the revolutionary movement of the working classes in industrialized countries and national liberation movements in colonized nations. The speaker's Marxist analysis had a profound effect on Dada. At one stroke, it blended his experience as a worker and an Indian in a composite sketch of the world. Its global vision for the world 'stirred [his] imagination'. With his interest piqued, Dada also consulted other literature, including *Russia Today*, which reported on a visit by a trade union delegation to Russia. The account he read was far removed from the stories he had heard in everyday life. Moved by what he read, he approached the CPUSA. He now wanted to go to the Soviet Union.

Into the Steppes and Beyond

If certain spaces in Europe and the United States were crucial nodes in an emerging radical geography, another key node was the Central Asian steppe. Central Asia, Afghanistan, and India's North Western Frontier had long been a source of concern for the Raj. In colonial reporting, these borderlands emerge as rugged, mystical, even legendary. They were

[78] Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 436–437.

home to 'fanatical' 'Mohammadan tribesmen', with none more famous than the Faqir of Ipi (born Mirza Ali Khan, c. 1892/7–1960), who fought a decades-long guerrilla battle against the British in Waziristan. At one point, nearly 40,000 troops were reportedly in search of him.[79] The British had been involved in this region since the 1830s when the 'Great Game' purportedly began. With the onset of the First World War and the Russian Revolution, the area became even more central to imperial calculations. With the combined threat of Pan-Islamism and Bolshevism, the Raj was faced with an unprecedented crisis on its western frontiers. Few movements exemplified that crisis better than the migration of thousands of young men from India.

One of these migrants was Shaukat Usmani. In the summer of 1920, he took the first steps of his transformative journey into Jalalabad, the first settlement after crossing the British Indian–Afghan frontier. He was part of the third *qafla* (caravan) of Indian Muslims to cross into Afghanistan. Most were young unmarried men from North India, especially from the North West Frontier Province (NWFP). They were all undertaking *hijrat*, a journey of great symbolic and emotive significance for many Muslims. India had been declared uninhabitable by prominent *ulema* (clergy), including the future Congress President, Abul Kalam Azad, who issued *fatwas* (religious edicts) declaring *hijrat* obligatory on Indian Muslims. Under a British Empire complicit in dismantling the Ottoman Caliphate and the alleged desecration of Muslim holy sites in Arabia, it was no longer possible for Muslims to stay in India. While some felt obligated to migrate, others were determined to make their way to Turkey, where they hoped to save the Caliphate from oblivion.[80] Most had been mobilized by the ongoing *Khilafat* and non-cooperation movements. Altogether, tens of thousands crossed into Afghanistan, where they were initially feted and greeted by Afghan officials. Amir Amanullah, the ruling Amir of Afghanistan, had extended an invitation to the *muhajirin* (migrants), pledging to support them materially. Most, however, returned in quick order once

[79] Notwithstanding its orientalist bent, the following article provides a useful overview of the faqir and his politics: Milan Hauner, 'One Man against the Empire: The Faqir of Ipi and the British in Central Asia on the Eve of and during the Second World War', *Journal of Contemporary History* (Sage) 16 (1981), 183–212.

[80] See Dietrich Reetz, *Hijrat: The Flight of the Faithful. A British File on the Exodus of Muslim Peasants from North India to Afghanistan in 1920* (Das Arabische Buch, 1995) and Shaukat Usmani, *Leaves from an Indian Muhajireen's Diary* (Swaraj Publishing House, 1927), p. 2. Also see Gail Minault, *The Kilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India* (Columbia University Press, 1982); Lal Baha, 'The Hijrat Movement and the North-West Frontier Province', *Islamic Studies* 18, 3 (1979), 231–242, and Mushiral Hasan, 'Religion and Politics: The Ulama and Khilafat Movement', *Economic and Political Weekly* 16, 20 (May 1981), 903–912.

they had overstayed their welcome and discovered that *hijrat* was not as glorious as they had imagined it to be. Fresh from the Third Anglo-Afghan War in 1919, the Amir of Afghanistan wished to use them as a bargaining chip against the British, but his kingdom was soon overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of *muhajirin* migrating to Afghanistan and by the tens of thousands more waiting to cross the border. At first, the Amir forbade further migration. Later, once his relations with the British improved, he drove most of the *muhajirin* from Afghanistan.[81]

Most returned to India. Others, determined to reach Anatolia and rescue the teetering Caliphate, struck north from Jabal al Saraj, where they had been lodged by the Amir. Shaukat Usmani was among them. On foot and armed with mock rifles to ward off hostile elements, the *muhajirin* forded fierce and turbulent rivers, crossed the snow-clad Hindu Kush with swollen, bloody feet, and stumbled half-starved, thirsty, and harassed by bandits, across seemingly endless deserts until they finally reached the last major northern town of 'Mazarisharip' (Mazar-i-Sharif).[82] Here they had to solicit the permission of the Bolshevik Consul to cross the border into Soviet Central Asia. As Usmani later recalled, they were expecting the Bolsheviks to be 'very rude and discourteous beings'. From reports and cartoons in the English press, they had imagined them to be 'vulgar, rustic and fearful people'. What they encountered could not have been further from that. Here is Usmani again:

> At length, we entered the place of the Bolshevik Consul. A young man of 25 greeted us in English and shook hands with us. He was wearing the Bolshevik helmet, long boots and a military uniform. Some of us took him for a page, some took him for a soldier.
>
> One of us said 'Sir, we want to see His Excellency the Consul.'
>
> He at once replied.
>
> 'Comrades, do not say "Sir" but "Comrade". I am the man you seek for. I represent the RSFSR and I greet you on behalf of the workers and peasants of Russia.'
>
> We were lost in amazement. How could he be a consul! How could he address the slaves thus? He is a white man like our white masters in India. We could not recover soon from our amazement.
>
> Is it a fact or are we dreaming?
>
> He. – 'Comrades, why should you be thus astonished. Why do you not respond? I say, I greet you in the name of my Government, the Government of the workers and the peasants of Russia.'

[81] See Reetz, *Hijrat*, pp. 58–73.
[82] Shaukat Usmani, *Peshawar to Moscow: Leaves from an Indian Muhajireen's Diary* (Swaraj Publishing House, 1927), pp. 16–37.

We slowly recovered our senses and replied:

'Sir … no … Comrade … we thank you for your kind courtesy. We did not understand you because we are treated in quite a different manner by our white masters.'

Consul: 'Comrades. Your chains are broken now. We are equals. There is one common tie between your people and ours, that we are oppressed and tyrannized by the Tsar while you are oppressed in your own home.'

The Consul took us in his bungalow-like building and introduced us to several others, young men and girls. They also showed an astoundingly courteous and fraternal attitude. We were entertained to tea, and broached our main topic of going to Russia. He gave us a letter of authority and sent one guide with us.[83]

It all sounds like a scene from a badly scripted movie. In all likelihood, this was not exactly how the encounter played out. Usmani was writing in 1927, seven years after he made his forays into Afghanistan. A purpose of his travelogue was to give readers a sense of 'one of most the critical periods in the world's history'. Many books had been written about Bolshevik Russia by 'prejudiced writers', he claimed.[84] This was Usmani's effort to correct the record. It was also an attempt to show Indian Muslims, particularly young men, how the *Khilafat* movement had been a badly conceived misadventure. In doing so, he undoubtedly embellished a few details and suppressed others.

Its precise facticity aside, what remains true is that the encounters described above were instrumental, transformative even, for those whose experiences and imaginations had been largely bound to the racialized system of imperial control in India. Others speak of similar transformative encounters, encounters that compelled them to both reassess their position as imperial subjects and the nascent anti-imperial struggle they were a part of. It also compelled them to reassess their refracted knowledge of Bolshevism. Though he does not mention it in his travelogue, this was not the first time Usmani had encountered Bolshevism. In his unpublished memoirs, *The Life Story of an Unknown Revolutionary*, Usmani speaks of how, by 1918, news of the Russian Revolution had reached his home in Bikaner, a princely state in Rajasthan, North India. Usmani at the time was a student in 9th/10th standard. 'In the remote corners of Bikaner', he wrote, 'people were found reading the newspapers and exchanging their views and news regarding the Bolsheviks.' Their news, however, was not entirely accurate. Through the local rumour mill, 'Bolshevik became Balshook, Bal Shevak and what not'. For Hindi speakers, Bal Shevak (Sevak) stood for 'saviour of children'.

[83] Ibid., pp. 38–40. [84] Ibid., Foreword.

But, more than their (possibly unreciprocated) love for children, the Bolsheviks also held out a promise for Usmani's generation. After all, Germany, 'the idol of Indian nationalist and revolutionaries', had been defeated in the Great War. And for those infused with patriotic and anti-British fervour, as Usmani self-professedly was, the Bolsheviks were a new anti-British power to look to up to. The uprising of 1919 further affirmed his hatred for British rule. Subsequently, it seemed only natural for Usmani to embark on *hijrat* the year after, determined, or so he claimed, to make his way to the Soviet Union. Still, this claim can only be assessed considering his later politics when he was loath to admit that he, too, could have been inspired by the *Khilafat* movement.

Whatever his motivations, the fact remained that the group's travels through Central Asia proved to be an eye-opening experience. The first indication that Central Asia under the Bolsheviks was a transformed world came when they crossed the Oxus (Amu Darya) to Tirmiz, the first town on the Soviet side, today in Uzbekistan. They were greeted by slogans in Russian:

> 'Long live the solidary of the oppressed people.'
> 'Long live the free people of India.'
> 'Long live free India.'

Unsure of what the slogans were about, they responded with cries of '*Bande Mataram*' and '*Allahu Akbar*'. They were, Usmani proudly reports, received with full pomp and ceremony, and paraded through town with a military guard of honour to the recitation of the *International*. Later they were given lectures in Russian and Persian by Bolshevik officials who recalled Tsarist tyranny and extolled the successes of the Revolution.[85] Other experiences and sights taught them that freedom was in 'her true guise here'.

> In spite of their poverty, the people looked more jovial, and revolution had instilled in them contentment and fearlessness. The real brotherhood of mankind could be seen amongst these people of 50 different races. No barriers of caste or religion hindered them from mixing up with one another. Every soul was transformed into an orator. Everywhere one could see a worker, a peasant or a soldier haranguing like a practiced lecturer. The speech, suppressed for centuries together, burst out like a flood.[86]

Not all were convinced, however. The 'fanatics', as Usmani disdainfully called them, were still determined to save the Caliphate. In the debate between the 'rational group' and the 'fanatics', the Pan-Islamists won out in their determination to reach Anatolia. Together, the eighty or so men

[85] Ibid., pp. 47–50. [86] Ibid., p. 56.

left Tirmiz for the territory controlled by 'Turkomans', who were fiercely opposed to the Bolsheviks. The *muhajirin* knew that they were walking into the midst of the ongoing Russian Civil War but were nevertheless confident of being received cordially by their brothers in faith, the Turkomans. They could not have been more wrong. Apprehended as soon as they crossed into hostile territory, they were incarcerated, starved, mercilessly beaten, threatened with execution, and 'enslaved' by their brothers in faith who took them to be 'Jadedi kafirs', or allies of the Bolsheviks.[87] Eventually, they were freed when their captors fled from the advancing Bolsheviks. Managing to make their way to a garrisoned town under Bolshevik control, the *muhajirin* had time to reflect on their treatment under the Turkomans. For Usmani, their near escape, at the cost of two comrades killed, was further proof that Pan-Islamism was a misbegotten political adventure. It also showed that the Bolsheviks were on the right side of history.[88]

What followed can only be sketched briefly here. Still split in two camps, half the *muhajirin* took up arms on behalf of the Bolsheviks and defended their garrison against invading Turkoman 'hordes'. In doing so, they parted company with the 'Anatolians', who were still driven by their dreams of reaching Turkey.[89] In due course, Usmani, along with his like-minded comrades, made his way to Jadedi-controlled Bokhara, and later to Tashkent, Samarkand, Andijan, and eventually to Moscow and other places in the Soviet Union.

While Usmani's sojourn in Moscow will be taken up in the following chapter, for now, it is important to note how he interpreted his experiences and encounters in Soviet Central Asia. These experiences were transformative for him, and presumably for others too. They also showed how a seemingly new and rapidly transforming world was understood through idioms that would be relatable and familiar to audiences in India. Take the following excerpts, for instance.

> For the first time, we learnt from the people there that 'Soviet' meant Panchayat.[90]

And again:

> Villages in the Soviet Union and especially in Eastern Russia, while differing in the details of their organization, present a social picture similar to the villages in India. They are essentially co-operative. The people of the west resent the idea of

[87] For an excellent account of Jadedis, and *jadidism* as a movement, see Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (University of California Press, 1999).

[88] Usmani, *Peshawar to Moscow*, pp. 57–77. [89] Ibid., pp. 77–91. [90] Ibid., p. 76.

the Soviet as much as they resent the idea of Panchayat. It is due to its coming into direct clash with their social experience which is individualistic in all respects and aspects. But on the other hand, the eastern tribes and clans as well as villages find nothing inconsistent in the Soviet idea since their mode of life is primarily social and not individual.

The social experience of the people of the East, from Siberia to China, from Turkestan to India, from Caucasus to Persia, is communistic. The doctrines of communism or *scientifically advanced Panchayatism* therefore finds a congenial welcome from the eastern people both because of the oppression of the western capitalistic system and more because of its being socially adaptable to them.

And then again:

An Indian village on the Ganges does not differ much from the villages on the Oxus or the Volga. The only marked difference is that in the former cooperation and general economic collection of and social interdependence are not so highly evolved. Within each hamlet there is a complete social and economic organization. But in the Russian village these organizations are more closely coordinated.[91]

There were other reports too, reports that highlighted a utopia in the making, 'where the lowest among men was made to feel his hidden worth'.[92] In that sense, Usmani's testimony is remarkable for being one of the few eyewitness accounts from India of a rapidly transforming world. But more than accounts of the rapid progress made under the Soviets in all spheres of life and the putrid, degenerate, and tyrannical world of the Czars and Amirs that preceded it, what is of interest here is how this world was rendered legible by Usmani. To be sure, his explicit purpose in writing his travelogue was to present a romanticized view of the Soviet Union to his audience in India. But in doing so, he sought to make connections that would resonate with his readers – connections that also undoubtedly resonated with him. Viewed another way, this was Usmani's attempt at making the Soviet Union and the Bolshevik Revolution seem *familiar* to his readers. Perhaps this was why Usmani spoke at length of the ostensibly shared customs, traditions, and values of the 'Orientals' of India and the Soviet Union, and, in particular, Central Asia. But, to return to the passages above, those connections were also made through a specific reading of space, and this is where his analysis of Indian and Soviet villages and their shared thread of *Panchayatism* became significant.

How are they significant? First, his analysis points to how spatiality was closely tied to politics. Spatial imaginations could be generative and formative to political thought and imaginaries. For Usmani and other

[91] Ibid., pp. 168–170. Emphasis added. [92] Ibid., p. 76.

travellers, certain spaces were alive with profound meanings and encounters, such that they understood themselves and their politics through those spaces and their experiences of travelling through and inhabiting them. Their accounts, rich with the description of one locale after another, resist other narratives, offered by historians from the Left or otherwise, that speak of these journeys in spaces that are abstract, colourless, and devoid of transformative encounters. Frequently, such accounts read merely like a list of cities and countries visited, with political thought itself being divorced from the experiences of travel and its relationship with space and spatial imaginations. Travel could make, even complete, someone. Perhaps this is why Usmani expressed the hope that his travelogue would instil the 'spirit of travel and adventure' he thought was all too lacking in the younger generation.[93]

Secondly, one can discern another set of connected logics at work in Usmani's attempts at weaving the Soviet Union and India into one composite fabric. In one sense, emphasizing spatial, social, and economic similarities between the two was a way of inserting India into History. This was a riposte to colonial discourse which, through its operative logic of establishing difference,[94] had kept India out of History. Put another way, the only History India could lay claim to was a history of lack, a history of absence, and a history of endless waiting. Within this discourse, India had neither the institutions, nor the social organization, nor indeed the values or character traits that could place it within the ranks of advanced societies. Yet here was an explicit attempt at claiming that India possessed the same attributes that the Soviet Union, in its role as the inaugurator of a post-imperial, post-capitalist and socially emancipated future, laid claim to. The only difference lay in the relatively more developed, evolved, and *scientifically advanced* forms of social organization that the Soviet Union had crafted. What's more, India, through its ancient mode of social and village organization, values, and even language (Slavonic languages, Usmani claimed, had once been under the 'tutelage' of Sanskrit and Persian[95]), had already preceded the Soviet Union. In other words, the future had already been inaugurated by India. The only task remaining was to infuse a spirit of scientific rationalism in pre-existing forms of social organization.

[93] Ibid., Foreword.
[94] An argument eloquently put forward by, among others, Partha Chatterjee in, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton University Press, 1993), chapter 2.
[95] Usmani, *Peshawar to Moscow*, p. 169.

Moreover, Usmani was also performing another manoeuvre in making his case: he was claiming the Soviet Union as part of the East. This stood in stark contrast to earlier formulations that viewed pre-revolutionary Russia as part of the West. As an illustration, one only needs to look at how the famed Russo-Japanese War of 1905 was viewed in India, as indeed elsewhere. For many, Japan's crushing victory over Russia was interpreted as a victory of the East over the West, of Asia over Europe, of the colonized over the colonizers.[96] With the Revolution, however, Russia became part of the East, not simply in the terms invoked by Usmani, but also for its strident opposition to European imperialism and its overtures towards Eastern countries such as Persia, Afghanistan, Turkey, and China.[97] This was a world, then, in which the Future lay in the East.

Glorifying eastern values and attributes over the supposedly individualistic and atomized West, however, was not the preserve of Usmani alone. Indeed, similar arguments had been made before – though obviously in different contexts with different intentions – by Mohandas Gandhi, Swami Vivekananda, and Rabindranath Tagore, among others. Nor was the attempt at linking India and the East with the Soviet Union and the arc of History confined to Usmani alone. An arguably more audacious attempt was made by Maulana Barkatullah, roving revolutionary, Pan-Islamist, Ghadarite, 'Prime Minister' of the Provisional Government of India in Afghanistan, and much else besides.[98] While Usmani may have been keen to underplay the links between Pan-Islamism and Bolshevism, Barkatullah's pronouncements and politics gave an insight into how the two were closely linked together in the immediate post-revolutionary moment.

Among his many exploits, Barkatullah wrote a pamphlet in Persian in 1919, apparently at the behest of Lenin himself, titled 'Bolshevism and Islam' or conversely 'Bolshevism and the Islamic Body Politic'. Composed in Tashkent, the pamphlet was intercepted and translated by

[96] See for instance Pankaj Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire: The Intellectuals Who Remade Asia* (Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2012).

[97] Usmani, *Peshawar to Moscow*, pp. 170–173.

[98] Biographies of Barkatullah are few and far between, though he repeatedly comes up in histories of the Ghadar Movement (Maia Ramnath's account, among others) and the Indian revolutionary movement in general. For a concise account of his politics, see Humayun Ansari, 'Maulana Barkatullah Bhopali's Transnationalism: Pan-Islamism, Colonialism, and Radical Politics', in Gotz Nordbruch and Umar Ryad (eds.), *Transnational Islam in Interwar Europe: Muslim Activists and Thinkers* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 181–210. For a biographical, albeit hagiographical, account, see Wajdi al Hussaini and Syed Abid Ali, *Maulana Barkatullah Bhopali: Inquilabi Savanih* (Madhya Pradesh Urdu Academy, 1986).

anxious British intelligence officials. Primarily addressed to the Muslims of Central Asia and Turkey, it sketched a rich portrait of his reflections on the history and essence of humankind. Through his reading, Barkatullah argued that 'Karl Marx and the lofty structures of Socialism were in line with world history'. More specifically, these contributions were in line with the historical task of divine religions, which had been 'revealed for putting an end to destitution, indigence, toil, misfortune and oppression among mankind, and for the ease quiet, freedom, brotherliness, and equality of Adam's children'. Islam, specifically, among its many innovations, had addressed social welfare and egalitarianism through the institution of *Bait-ul-Mal*, among others, which was intended for the 'subversion of poverty, starvation, want and destination [destitution?] at all times and in all places'. Indeed, the golden age of early Islamic history bore testament to how the Bait-ul-Mal was used for that purpose. Yet, owing to the despotism introduced by tyrannical caliphs 1300 years before, Muslims had experienced a steady decline to the extent that 'not a single independent Moslem State' remained today. Attempts made towards that end, such as the introduction of a modern, constitutional Turkish government in 1908, had been extinguished by the 'tyrannical British, Russian, and French' governments, which were aided in turn by the 'traitorous Sheriff of Mecca' who rebelled against the Caliphate in the famed Arab Revolt during the First World War. Following the war, the promises of Wilson had been violated in the most 'shameless and flagrant manner'. But now, with the revolution, there was 'no cause for despair'. For 'following on the dark long nights of Czarist autocracy, the dawn of human freedom [had] appeared on the Russian horizon, with Lenin as the shining sun giving light and splendour to this day of human happiness'. Thereafter, Barkatullah listed the many achievements of the Revolution and accused British imperialism of keeping 'Asiatic nations in a state of eternal thraldom'. The time had come, therefore,

> for the Muhammadans of the world and Asiatic nations to understand the noble principles of Russian Socialism and to embrace it seriously and enthusiastically … O Muhammadans! Listen to this Divine cry: respond to this call of liberty, equality and brothership which brother Lenin and the Soviet Government of Russia are offering to you.[99]

Was this pamphlet effective? There is no way of knowing how widely it was circulated, nor whether it inspired any of its readers to take up arms for the Bolsheviks. Even so, Barkatullah's passionate appeal did reflect

[99] IOR/L/PS/10/886:1919–1921, 1229/1920 Part 1, 'Russia Bolshevik Menace to India, '"Central Asia"', pp. 77–81.

the tenor of the times when ideas and political boundaries were in a constant state of flux. Nor was this the only attempt at linking Pan-Islamism with Bolshevism. Such attempts were made outside India too. Thus, *fatwa* after *fatwa* was issued across Muslim Central Asia arguing that Bolshevism was in complete harmony with Islam. One even argued that Islam was more communist than Bolshevism. Other scholars argued that the best way to propagate Bolshevism in Islamic countries was to propagate Wahabism, held to be 'an improved form of Islamic Bolshevism'.[100]

As far-fetched as this may sound to the reader today, this fiery rhetoric was enough to send alarm bells ringing within the British imperial establishment. It seemed that Russian Bolshevism and Pan-Islamic/Wahabi 'fanaticism' were converging in an unstable Central Asia, Afghanistan, and Persia to pose a serious threat to British imperial interests and not least the Raj itself. It seemed that the worst fears of the British Raj were coming to pass. It is of course tempting to pass off British anxiety as paranoia, as some scholars have done.[101] But this would understate the unpredictability and fluidity of the post-revolutionary moment, when both Bolshevism and Pan-Islamism seemed open to various possible directions. As one official argued:

> In attempting to gauge the menace of Bolshevism we must grip facts even if these appear to conflict with theory. It can well be argued that Bolshevism and Pan Islamism are fundamentally irreconcilable and that therefore we have little to fear from such an unnatural combination.
>
> This is logically correct, but the Bolsheviks, absolute opportunists and utterly unscrupulous, are endeavouring to exploit Pan-Islamism or any form of Muhammadan fanaticism and their efforts have not been wholly unsuccessful. The immediate danger of this phase of their activities lies in Afghanistan, Central Asia and Persia. Again, it may be said that Bolshevism is foreign and repugnant to the Indian temperament and that there is thus little fear of its doctrines spreading to India. This is also probably true, but the chameleon like propensities of Bolshevism will no doubt enable it to overcome any minor difficulties of this sort, and its propaganda will be coloured to suit the fancy of whatever dissatisfied elements of the population it wishes to appeal to. As, unfortunately, there are plenty of such elements to work on, the situation calls for great vigilance on our part.[102]

[100] Ibid., p. 87.
[101] In his valuable article on Barkatullah's politics, Humayun Ansari comments on how colonial intelligence tended to overestimate the impact of these figures. See Ansari, 'Maulana Barkatullah Bhopali's Transnationalism'.
[102] IOR/L/PS/10/886, Russia Bolshevik Menace to India, 'Notes on Bolshevik Situation to 17th September 1919', pp. 94–95.

Part of this vigilance also required vigorous efforts at counter-propaganda. To that end, anti-Bolshevik pamphlets were liberally distributed across Central Asia. One explicitly sought to counter Barkatullah's pamphlet. Issued in Delhi and authored by a religious divine, Saiyid Abdus Samed Al-Hussaini – whose list of achievements included pilgrimages to shrines in the Hejaz, Mesopotamia, and Persia; personal acquaintances with Turkish leaders, Arab Sheikhs, Persian nobles, and Indian Rajas; and a professorship in the 'great University of Bombay' – the new 'Islam and Bolshevism' attacked Barkatullah, called his faith into question, and accused him of pleasing 'pig-eating infidels of Russia'. Bolshevism, he argued, had attracted the 'very dregs of Russians and irreligious, unpatriotic, sinful people, Jews, *Kafirs*, robbers, pickpockets, and bloodthirsty assassins'. Thereafter, Al-Hussaini countered each of Barkatullah's claims and listed the outrages committed under Bolshevik rule. Needless to say, the pamphlet finally ended on the favourable impact of British rule and military intervention.[103]

For British interests, such exercises were crucial in curtailing the romantic and utopic appeal of Bolshevism. Bolshevism was not merely a movement led by 'opportunists'. Instead, it held out the hope of salvation, redemption, and freedom for many who considered themselves suppressed by imperial tyranny. As another intelligence report noted, 'in the Near East, natives who hardly know the meaning of the word Bolshevism are playing with its tenets like a new toy and all confidently believe that it is a mysterious power which is going to end all their troubles'.[104] For what it was worth, this analysis pointed to the political and ideological fluidity of Bolshevism in this period. For those who been politicized and radicalized through significantly disparate experiences, the Bolshevik Revolution and the ideals of Communist Internationalism offered a broad umbrella under which they could converge, united by the promise and dream of liberation, emancipation, and revolution. What that meant specifically may have differed from one individual to the next, but this moment does point to a time when the transformation of the world seemed like an imminent possibility. It was the politics of expectation and anticipation, in other words, that drove the individuals in this story to unfathomable lengths in their political lives.

Widening Gaze

Sohan Singh Bhakna. 'Dada' Amir Haider Khan. Shaukat Usmani. For all their varied encounters, experiences, ideas, and journeys, there was

[103] Ibid., pp. 88–90. [104] Ibid., p. 86.

one constant refrain in their accounts. This is a refrain that is echoed in other first-hand accounts too. In Urdu or Hindi, it would read as '*ankhen khul gayein*' (our eyes were opened). Their emphasis on eyes, sight, gaze, and vision – Dada's memoir even has a chapter titled 'Widening Vision' – seemed inextricably tied to the world that lay beyond India. It was as if the world beyond gave them a set of lenses through which they could see more clearly. Their experiences were a persistent reminder of the world's unremitting and unforgiving harshness, which in turn allowed them to see the extent, scale, and brutal reality of their oppression as exploited, colonized, and racialized subjects. Or to invoke Adorno again, the mote in their eye was their 'best magnifying glass'. But, more importantly, it also showed them ways through which they could invert that reality. Perhaps this explains why many wrote of itinerancy as an act that could lead to an ethical conception and reordering of the world. This was an internationalism of the exiled, an internationalism of the itinerant.

But more than anything else, what emerges repeatedly across Bhakna's, Dada's and Usmani's testimonies is a world structured along racial difference. In many ways, itinerant revolutionaries came to understand this world through their bodies. Writing decades after these encounters were reported, felt, and dissected, Frantz Fanon theorized how the coloured body understood itself in relation to the world.[105] For Fanon, this understanding also brought with it a political awakening, and a consciousness that recognized structures of oppression with far greater clarity than ever before. In thinking through their encounters with Fanon's insights, it becomes clear just how deeply Bhakna's, Dada's and Usmani's politics were tied to the personal. To that end, their politics was not simply a product of cosmopolitan engagements. Nor was it only tied to cosmopolitan spaces. That, at any rate, has been emphasized in works on relatively elite figures within these movements, such as Lala Hardayal, M.N. Roy, V.N. Chattopadhyaya, and others. For more ordinary figures, and especially for individuals like Dada, politics was a harsher affair. It flowed from the unremitting harshness and difficulty of the world they had been thrown into.

Even so, there was something extraordinary about this moment. Given the intellectual and political ferment of their times, radical and revolutionary politics were channelled through a multitude of socio-political expressions. While originating from different directions, these distinct

[105] See in particular the chapter on 'Fact of Blackness', which both extends and critiques Maurice Merleau-Ponty's philosophy in relation to the body and phenomenology. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks* (Pluto Press, 2008, originally published in French as *Peau Noire, Masques Blanc*, 1952).

threads of political radicalism still came together through a loosely connected web of revolutionary networks. Most, if not all, of these networks later gravitated towards the Bolshevik Revolution. It was not simply that the October Revolution had 'awakened the oppressed peoples of the East', as Harikishen Singh Surjeet, General Secretary of the CPI (M), was to put it many years later.[106] It was rather that the Bolshevik Revolution provided a broad surface onto which a variety of utopian imaginations could be projected. Whether based on class, nationality, race, gender or even religion, communism initially functioned as a broad church with a dizzying variety of utopian denominations. Indeed, few exemplified that better than Maulvi Barkatullah.

This moment did not last long, however. Stalinism and increasing ideological conformity closed off that initial promise. But that did not prevent Indian revolutionaries from flocking to the Soviet Union. After all, their experiences had taught them that the world of the old was no longer tenable or bearable. The Soviet Union was a reminder that not only was another world possible but that another world was already being inaugurated. It was this sense, this belief, that drove Indian revolutionaries to extraordinary lengths in their political lives. This is what made their politics possible. And it was their yearning for that possibility that drove many of them to leave for Moscow.

[106] Jyoti Basu (ed.), *Documents of the Communist Party of India* (*1917–28*), vol. 1 (National Book Agency, 1997), p. xxvii.

3 Break with the Old World

> Only in us does this light still burn, and we are beginning a fantastic journey toward it, a journey toward the interpretation of our waking dream, toward the implementation of the central concept of utopia. To find it, to find the right thing, for which it is worthy to live, to be organized, and to have time: that is why we go, why we cut new, metaphysically constitutive paths, summon what is not, build into the blue, and build ourselves into the blue, and there seek the true, the real, where the merely factual disappears – *incipit vita nova*.[1]
>
> Ernst Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia*

Late on the chilly Sunday morning of 20 March 1926, Dada Amir Haider Khan's train pulled into Moscow after a thirty-hour journey. It had been two and a half months since he had left New York on a trip that would ordinarily have taken two weeks. He had departed from New York with six other Indians, five of whom were members of the Ghadar Party.[2] All had been sent by the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) through an arrangement with the Communist International, headquartered in Moscow. Their travel papers had been issued by the Soviet Consul in Montreal because the United States did not have diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union at the time. Their first objective was finding a liner that did not travel through the English Channel or to a British port. They would have been immediately apprehended had the port or policing authorities caught wind of the fact that a few Indians with Soviet passports were travelling to the Soviet Union. Eventually, a French liner headed to various destinations in the Mediterranean and, later, to Constantinople was found. Travelling as third-class passengers, the aspiring revolutionaries reached Constantinople, where the Soviet consulate arranged their transfer to another ship that had apparently been

[1] Ernst Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia* (Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 3.

[2] One of them, Harjap Singh, also wrote about his travels to and experiences in Moscow. Harjap Singh's account closely matches that of Dada's. See Kesar Singh Kesar and Jasbir Kaur Kesar (eds.), *Diary Ghadri Baba Harjap Singh* (Desh Bhagat Yadgar Committee, 1998). Excerpts transcribed, translated, and annotated by Amarjit Chandan.

purchased to transfer them and a few others via the Black Sea to Odessa, in the Ukraine. As they boarded the ship, the crew marked the beginning of their journey to the Soviet Union and a new world with a stirring rendition of the *International*. It was the stuff that dreams are made of. Once they reached Odessa, they were transferred to the 'House of Political Immigrants', the first stop for political émigrés on their way to either Moscow or Leningrad. Shortly thereafter, they were finally put on a train departing for Moscow.[3]

Their journey was no less arduous than the one undertaken by Naina Singh Dhoot and his compatriots. Naina Singh had set sail from Argentina seven or eight years after Dada and his comrades had made their crossing. Naina's group of Ghadarites consisted of nine men. Their first stop was an unspecified port in Germany (most likely Hamburg), where they were met by Rattan Singh, who had recruited them for the Ghadar Party in Argentina. They were also joined by another Punjabi who had made a remarkable journey all the way from Fiji. All ten men were from the Doaba region in the Punjab. Later, they were led to Berlin, where arrangements had been made for their board and lodging. For communists, Berlin was a city fraught with many dangers. Adolf Hitler had only very recently been appointed as Chancellor of Germany, and they had had very little inkling of what that meant for communists. The blood-curdling stories their German comrades told them – of indiscriminate killings, of mutilated bodies, of body parts sent to relatives – left them shaken at the unspeakable atrocities committed by the fascist regime. Fortunately for them, they did not stay long in Germany. Their German comrades had managed to smuggle them onto a ship bound for Leningrad. It was only after their ship had crossed the territorial waters of Germany that they felt free and optimistic about their journey to the Soviet Union. On reaching Leningrad, they gained an impression of what this world looked like. In the precious few days they had to explore the city, everybody looked pretty much the same. There was, apparently, no sign of the indigent and the poor. But they did not have enough time to ascertain that for themselves – shortly after, they were put on a train to Moscow, where they were met by representatives of the Communist International. After a hazardous journey that had originated at some point in the Punjab and veered through Singapore, Fiji, Argentina, and Germany, Naina Singh and company had finally arrived in the New World.[4]

Were these stories extraordinary for their times? Far from it, in fact. It is only in hindsight that the epic travels of Dada, Rattan Singh, Naina

[3] Gardezi, *Chains to Lose*, vol. II, pp. 516–531.
[4] Dhoot, *The Political Memoirs*, pp. 105–111.

Singh, Shaukat Usmani, and countless others, seem scarcely believable. And yet, in that utopian moment, these circuitous and risky journeys were only a few amongst countless others. In undertaking such momentous and transformative journeys, Indian revolutionaries joined an untold number from across the world for whom Moscow meant many things: the symbol and capital of world revolution, patron-in-chief of their anti-colonial struggles, and a site where a utopia, a new future, a new age, and a new human were being inaugurated. It was simply, to invoke Ernst Bloch, the inauguration of a new life. For some who did not see Moscow with such reverence, participating in the ever-unfolding revolution held out the promise of adventure, of discovery, of escaping the monotony of their everyday lives. That, at any rate, seemed to be why an individual called X by Dada signed up for travelling to Moscow. Apparently, he had nothing better to do.[5]

Clearly, though, the overriding motivation for travelling to Moscow seems to be a feverish commitment to freeing India from imperial rule. That, at any rate, seems to be the tone of the few first-hand accounts we have of Indian revolutionaries in Moscow. All consider their anti-colonial sentiment the primary driving force behind their turn to the city. These memoirs, it should be said, pale in contrast to the countless reports produced by imperial authorities on Indians in the Soviet Union. Most were compiled through an extensive web of surveillance and espionage that stretched from the United States to South East Asia. Others were extracted in prisons and courtrooms. The direct testimonies we have come from the very few accounts of journeys to the Soviet Union. It is, of course, difficult to accept these accounts at face value, refracted as they are through memory and individual blind spots. Most were also written in an unapologetic defence of the Soviet Union and the Bolshevik Revolution. Other motivations for writing included burnishing one's communist credentials and legacy in the history of revolutionary struggles. To that end, these testimonies were predictably celebratory, frequently hagiographic, and unfailingly uncritical of the Soviet Union. And yet, it is not so simple to dismiss these accounts as mere propaganda. Irrespective of their ideological bent, these testimonies were still striking for their depiction of a utopian world in the making. The world they bore witness to was one of the great, if not the greatest, political and social experiments of the twentieth century. Moscow was not only an embodiment of a rapidly transforming world: it was also a glimpse into what a transformed world could, and should, look like.

[5] Gardezi, *Chains to Lose*, vol. II, p. 492.

In bearing witness to a transforming and transformative world, these revolutionaries also bore witness to a rapidly transforming self. As intriguing as the narrations of their time in the Soviet Union are, their accounts are equally telling of what they reveal about the utopianism of their times. Each memoir or testimony, whether recorded directly or indirectly through the good offices of intelligence and policing services, spoke of an affective relationship with Time and History itself. In varying degrees, these revolutionaries imagined themselves living in an age of possibilities, an age of transformations, and an age of rebirths. For that reason, perhaps, their narratives speak of one transformative encounter after another, in an endless and inexorable personal journey of overcoming towards political consciousness, enlightenment, and a coming of age. There was, in other words, no politics of utopia without a concomitant transforming self. To that end, their accounts frequently speak of 'conversions' to communism in ways that echo the devotion of reborn, fervent believers. In that sense, their testimonies are remarkably self-reflexive. All, in varying degrees, marvelled at how far they had come in political and intellectual terms. Even more striking, perhaps, is how these individuals imagined themselves as willing, fully conscious, agents of History. And yet, they also felt burdened by History and the role it had decreed for them. Far from being unusual, this was characteristic of the revolutionary times these individuals inhabited. And there was no better embodiment of that than the people, institutions, and ideas they encountered in Moscow.

A World on Fire

Their patron in Moscow was the Communist International, also known as the Comintern or the Third International. Founded in Moscow in 1919 as the successor to the Second and First Internationals, the Comintern was intended as a party for communist parties around the world. The template had already been set by Lenin in 1917 when he declared that the Bolsheviks would take the initiative in creating a Third International. By the end of the First World War it had become clear to the Bolsheviks and allied parties that the old socialist and social-democratic camps under the Second International 'had become completely bankrupt' and were incapable of revolutionary action.[6] Among other things, the Socialist International had, by and large, supported the war, an act that was viewed

[6] Jane Degras (ed.), *The Communist International 1919–1943: Documents*, *Vol. 1, 1919–1922* (Oxford University Press, 1956), 'Invitation to the First Congress of the Communist International', p. 1.

by Lenin and others as an egregious betrayal of the working classes of Europe. The Communist International, then, was intended as a truly revolutionary body that would lead the workers of the world in a global revolutionary upheaval towards socialism. Its First Congress, hastily, and comically, organized in Moscow in March 1919 with only a few dozen delegates, made little secret of its ambitions for World Revolution.[7] To that end, it was open to all communist parties around the world. Indeed, communist parties of other countries were viewed as national sections of this one centrally organized body. Its dominance by Bolsheviks and the ensuing shifts in its policy aside, the ethos of the Comintern's internationalism was reflected in its very make-up and in the concerns with which it preoccupied itself until its dissolution in 1943.[8]

Allied to this commitment was a very real sense of inaugurating a new age and a new world. In the Comintern's documents, it is difficult to understate the significance of this imagined new epoch. It is difficult for a reader otherwise used to plodding through dense and mind-numbing analyses on modes of production, material conditions, capitalism, imperialism, and so on, not to be struck by the tenor and imagery of Comintern pronouncements. The language is apocalyptic, the narrative marked by convulsions, the vision millenarian, the tone fierce, angry, unforgiving, breathless, urgent. Text after text unabashedly and pompously predicts the birth pangs of a new, utopian world amid the disease, crisis, devastation, exhaustion, decay, collapse, and the moral and material disintegration of the old. These, it should be said, were only a few among many such terms used to describe the ongoing crisis, and opportunity, of a post-war world. Foremost among these opportunities was the promise of an imminent Revolution, a revolution that would do away with the old, the stultified, the decayed and the diseased. Indeed, nowhere is this better depicted than in the iconic poster of Lenin sweeping the world of 'filth' by the famed poster artist, Viktor Deni.[9]

It is difficult to fault the Bolsheviks and their allies for reaching this conclusion. The First World War, characterized as a war between hostile imperialisms, had brought unprecedented devastation and ruin to

[7] For a rich, vivid, and occasionally comical, description of the First Congress, see the chapter 'The Third International' in Arthur Ransome, *Russia in 1919*, www.marxists.org/history/archive/ransome/works/1919-russia/index.htm.

[8] For a broad overview, see Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, *The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (Macmillan Press, 1996). For a briefer overview, see the opening chapter of William J. Chase, *Enemies within the Gates? The Comintern and the Stalinist Repression, 1934–1939* (Yale University Press, 2001).

[9] For an overview of Bolshevik art and revolutionary illustrations, see Stephen White, *The Bolshevik Poster* (Yale University Press, 1990).

Europe. The unimaginable horror and loss of life, coupled with severe political and economic instability, seemingly spelled the death of the old world. Meanwhile, Europe, and Germany in particular, was suffering from civil unrest and political upheavals. It only seemed a matter of time before revolutionary tides swept Europe. 'Humanity', as Eric Hobsbawm pithily put it, 'was waiting for an alternative.'[10] Adding to the fervour and urgency of the moment was a visceral fear of 'new crises, new wars' and the consequent 'impoverishment of whole countries and the death of millions of workers'.[11] If anything, the anticipated war would be vastly more 'destructive, inhuman and horrible than its predecessor'.[12]

For many, then, the only thing that could possibly redeem humanity was a global revolutionary upheaval. This was partly why the question of imperialism was central to the Comintern's concerns. The Comintern's position on the colonial question echoed Lenin's firm support for national liberation struggles around the globe, not least because the colonial question was inseparably linked to revolution in Europe. Lenin, along with other major thinkers like John Hobson and Karl Kautsky, had long considered imperialism to be ineluctably linked to capitalism, with his pamphlet 'Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism' being the most prominent explication of his argument.[13] To overthrow capitalism in the West, then, it was essential to overthrow imperialism in the colonies. Put differently, the revolution in the West would come via the East. 'We are bound to you by a common destiny,' Karl Radek had promised delegates in a fiery speech at the famous Congress of the Peoples of the East held in Baku in September 1920. As secretary of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI), he made it clear that the question of internationalist solidarity and unity was a matter of survival for both East and West.[14] For that reason, the proletariat in Western Europe could not afford to neglect the colonial question. After all, as Lenin had argued, proletarian internationalism would remain a 'meaningless phrase' until the proletariat demanded 'the right of political secession for the colonies and for the nations that "its own" nation oppresses'.[15] From its very inception the Comintern

[10] Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes* (Abacus edn, 1995), p. 55.
[11] Degras, *The Communist International 1919–1943*, p. 237.
[12] Ibid., p. 301.
[13] V.I. Lenin, 'Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism' (1917), www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc.
[14] Degras, *The Communist International 1919–1943*, p. 105. For the complete proceedings of the Congress, see Brian Pearce (trans.), *Congress of the Peoples of the East, Baku September 1920 (Stenographic Report)* (New Park Publications, 1977).
[15] V.I. Lenin, 'The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self Determination 1916', www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/jan/x01.htm.

was occupied with internationalizing the revolution, and this was a commitment that survived, however tenuously, Joseph Stalin's declaration of 'Socialism in One Country' and the apparent abandonment of the idea of world revolution.[16]

This seemingly ironclad commitment was predictably attractive to revolutionaries across the colonized world, particularly those from the British Empire, the primary target of Comintern schemes. As Grigory Zinoviev, President of the ECCI, thundered at the Baku Congress, the Comintern was ready to 'help the East to liberate itself from English Imperialism' in a near cosmic struggle that was likened to a 'real holy war'.[17] The Manifesto of the Congress repeatedly cried out to the 'Peoples of the East' – an overly generous category including Indians, Turks, Afghans, Persians, Arabs, Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Armenians, Georgians, Tartars, and many others besides – to save themselves, and the rest of the world, from capitalism and British imperialism. Meanwhile, the message for British comrades was equally clear. The Second Congress of the Comintern had already declared that any British socialist who failed to 'support by all possible means the uprisings in Ireland, Egypt, and India' deserved to be 'branded with infamy, if not with a bullet'.[18] Indeed, it was only through internationalizing the revolution that British comrades could hope to bring about a revolution in Britain itself.

Also present at the Baku Congress, along with 1891 delegates – 44 of them women – from 32 nationalities, were delegates from India.[19] A few among them were *muhajirin*. Far from being the first to do so, they were part a rapidly growing number of Indians who were gravitating towards Moscow. First in the field were two remarkable characters from Delhi, the brothers Sattar Khairi and Jabbar Khairi, who reportedly interviewed Lenin as early as November 1918. They also addressed in Urdu a meeting of the 'Executive Committee of the Soviet', in which they congratulated the leaders of the Russian Revolution on behalf of '70 million Indian Mussalmans' and asked for their assistance in freeing Indians from the

[16] Tim Rees and Andrew Thorpe (eds.), *International Communism and the Communist International 1919–43* (Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 1.

[17] Degras, *The Communist International 1919–1943*, p. 105. These references to 'Holy War' went hand in hand with invocations of *ghazvaat* (wars waged by the Prophet) and the green banner of the Prophet. As E.H. Carr put it, this was clearly an attempt to court Muslim opinion and support. See E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917–1923*, vol. 3 (W.W. Norton, 1985). Also see 'Manifesto of the Congress to the Peoples of the East' in Pearce, *Congress of the Peoples of the East Baku*, pp. 163–173, www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/baku/manifesto.htm.

[18] Ibid. p. 180.

[19] Ibid. p. 105.

'high-handed oppression of the English'.[20] They were the first of many deputations of Indians who would approach Moscow for consultation, training, support and sustenance over the following years. These included a stellar cast of Indian revolutionaries of this period: Rattan Singh and Santokh Singh from the Ghadar Party, Virendranath Chattopadhyaya of the Berlin India Committee, Maulvi Barkatullah and Ubaidullah Sindhi of the former 'Provisional Government of India' in Kabul and, last but not least, M.N. Roy. To this list one can add other prominent Indian revolutionaries, all of whom initially viewed the Bolshevik Revolution as a lodestone that could pave the way for a revolutionary upheaval of global proportions and help free India from imperial rule.

It was easy to be drawn to the Soviet Union. From Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky to Grigory Zinoviev and Karl Radek, the leaders of the Bolshevik Revolution had all pointed to India as one the sites to which the revolution had to be exported. The importance of India to World Revolution was emphasized time and again in the thunderous pronouncements of the Baku Congress. Britain, as the Congress's Manifesto pointed out, had pillaged India and turned its peasants and workers into 'dumb beasts of burden without any rights'. To add to that, millions of Indians had died of hunger year upon year. Meanwhile, Indians had fought for the Empire in all corners of the world. And yet, to add insult to injury, Indians had been treated as pariahs in their own nation, in which every demand for rights, for autonomy, for parity, was met by 'ruthless mass shootings'.[21] There was little option, then, but for a revolutionary upheaval that would overthrow the British Empire. To that end, the Comintern emphatically supported the revolutionary struggle in India. Indeed, one of the most visible manifestations of that commitment was the founding of a political and military training school for Indian revolutionaries in Tashkent in 1920. Run under the auspices of M.N. Roy, the 'Tashkent school' catered to the *muhajirin* who had pledged their loyalty to the Soviet Union and the Bolshevik Revolution. While the school itself was short-lived, the Soviet Union's active support for Indian revolutionaries continued long into the 1940s. There was no better evidence of that than the unceasing stream of Indian revolutionaries that continued to flock to Moscow in search of a new world.

The Allure of Moscow

While the Baku Congress may not have contributed much to posterity, apart from its fiery and colourful speeches, it did in part lead to the

[20] IOR/L/PS/10/886 'Russia: Bolshevik Menace to India'. 'Telegram from Consul General Kashgar to Foreign Secretary to the Government of India', 21 February 1919.
[21] Pearce, *Congress of the Peoples of the East*, pp. 165–166.

founding of the Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow in 1920, and in the following year, the famed Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV).[22] Both were part of an impressive apparatus of institutes aimed at consolidating the Revolution in the Soviet Union and exporting it elsewhere in the world. This was precisely what the imperial authorities feared. For that reason, substantial resources were dedicated to keeping an eye on these institutes. And there were many to keep an eye on. From a comprehensive list compiled by imperial intelligence in 1930, it seems that the Soviet Union, and Moscow in particular, was teeming with such institutes. There was, for instance, the Lenin University for Marxian and Leninist Studies. Said to specialize in 'advanced theoretical studies', this alleged 'center of agitation' mainly catered to 'orientals', with many 'Chinese and Negroes' filling its ranks along with a few Europeans. Yet another institute, the Chinese University for the Toilers of China, formerly known as the Sun Yat Sen University, catered exclusively to Chinese and Korean students. The course here lasted four years. Similarly, the Institute of Eastern Studies offered another four-year programme. With seven departments – 'Arab, Turkish, Persian, Chinese, Japanese, Mongolian and Hindustani' – the course trained 'worker specialists for diplomatic and commercial activities in Eastern Countries'. In a somewhat different vein, the International Agrarian Institute claimed to be a 'scientific–investigatory' department for the pressing issue of 'agriculture and the peasant movement in various countries of the world'. Attended by 'orientals of various nationalities', the institute specialized 'in Anglo Saxon counties, the Far East, and Farther Asia and Africa'.[23] Elsewhere in the Soviet Union were other institutes, such as the Leningrad Oriental Institute, Central Asian State University, Communist University 'Seerdloff', and the Communist University of the National Minorities of the East. The Leningrad institute in particular was an institution of some repute. With a programme of four years and catering to members of the Communist Party – three years in the case of workers and peasants and five in the case of others – the institute claimed to be 'the highest Communist educational establishment devoted to oriental studies' with an aim of preparing 'both practical and scientific workers for the Eastern Countries'.[24] Further complementing this impressive list were other organizations and platforms that performed specific functions. For

[22] Degras, *The Communist International 1919–1943*, p. 106.
[23] IOR/L/P&J/12/412, 'Communist Training Schools for Indians in Moscow and Tashkent', 'Letter from Sir E Ovey to Mr. A Henderson, July 7 1930', pp. 2–4.
[24] Quoted in ibid., 'Communist Training Schools', 'Training of Indians in Communist Schools in Moscow and Elsewhere', p. 6.

instance, 'Mopr', or the International Society for Assistance to Fighters for the Revolution, with branches in 'nearly all countries', assisted 'political prisoners in foreign countries and their families with money and legal advice'. Founded in 1922 under the Comintern, the society also allegedly worked on the usual tasks of 'agitation and propaganda, especially by means of journals and pamphlets'. In 1927 alone, the society was thought to have issued '41 periodicals in various languages and 122 pamphlets'. Capping off this list were other institutions thought to deal with 'propaganda' aboard. Chief amongst them were the Agitburo (a section of the Politburo), Profintern (Red International of Labour Unions (RILU)), which 'chiefly devoted itself to Pacific, India, China, Australia and Polynesia', KEM (Communist International of Youth), Krestintern (Peasants International), Sportintern (Sport International) and others.[25]

For all their concern at the increasingly sophisticated and extensive apparatus for exporting revolution, one institute in particular, stood out for imperial authorities. The Communist University of the Toilers of the East functioned as one of the premier institutes for revolutionaries coming to the Soviet Union for political training and education. Its function was concisely elucidated by Joseph Stalin at a meeting of KUTV students in 1925. Outlining the 'political tasks' of the university, Stalin declared that the KUTV stood 'with one foot on Soviet soil and the other on the soil of the colonies and dependent countries'. Broadly catering to 'sons of the East' from dozens of 'nations and national groups', the university had two main groups of students. The first hailed from the 'Soviet East', where imperialist oppression had been overthrown and the workers were in power. The second came from 'colonial and dependent countries', where capitalism still reigned under imperialist subjugation. For the latter, the university's objective was clear: having come 'thirsting for light and knowledge', comrades from colonial and semi-colonial countries were to be made into 'real revolutionaries', armed with both the theory and 'practical experience' of Leninism to enable them to carry out the 'tasks of the liberation movement … with all their heart and soul'.[26] They were, in other words, the agents and drivers of History.

Standing in stark contrast to Stalin's poetic depiction was the imperial view that saw Kutva graduates as mere 'agitators'. The 'university' – mentioned in quotes in report after report – 'train[ed] agitators, both

[25] Ibid., 'Communist Training Schools', 'Letter from Sir E Ovey to Mr. A Henderson, July 7 1930', pp. 2–4.

[26] J. Stalin, 'The Political Tasks of the University of the Peoples of the East: Speech Delivered at a Meeting of Students of the Communist University of the Toilers of the East', www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1925/05/18.htm.

foreign and Russian' through a curriculum that included 'Marxism, Leninism, historical materialism, Marxian economics, economic geography, Marxian history, and the language of the country of which the student is a native, or to which … [they] are to be sent'. They were also instructed in the dark arts of 'agitation', 'building up of cells, public and secret', 'military tactics', 'field work', and 'musketry'.[27] Thus trained, Kutva 'students' – another one of those terms used with obligatory quotation marks – were ready for leading the revolutionary struggle in their countries. Or so it seemed. There were many things that could go wrong, including the forlorn hope held out by some in the intelligence services that the harshness of everyday life in Moscow would dissuade many aspiring revolutionaries from their chosen path. Thus, as one dispatch wryly remarked,

> The conditions under which they live are for the most part, frankly, bad … in one 'students' home' visited by a foreign journalist at the end of 1929, more than twenty pupils were living in one large room, their mattresses covering almost the entire floor. Sixty roubles a month does not go very far in Moscow, and thus they are apt to lose some of their enthusiasm, particularly in view of the long period of the course, and the fact that they are expected to spend their holidays in intensive study of the Soviet system, usually in some remote and unattractive village.[28]

This less-than-charitable view of life in Moscow stood in stark contrast to the few accounts we have of Indian revolutionaries in Moscow. For Dada, as indeed for others, studying in Kutva was an eye-opening experience that began the moment they joined the university. For a lascar who had sailed around the world twice and lived and travelled in the United States for five years, Dada had never met people 'of so many diverse races and nationalities', let alone share a communal life with them, as he did in the university. The majority, as Dada recounted, came from 'the eastern Soviets'. The rest came from 'the colonial and semi-colonial east, including Japan'. Also in attendance were 'Turks, Greeks, Moroccans, Tunisians and a few Negroes from the USA' along with a 'young American woman and one British', both of 'Jewish origin'. Not unexpectedly, the largest group of foreign students came from China.[29]

Dada was hardly the only one to remark on the scarcely believable diversity of the student population. Naina Singh Dhoot too, devotes a substantial passage to it, as does Shaukat Usmani. Their narratives are further supplemented by other accounts, such as the following excerpt reproduced in a variety of sources from the *Soviet Russia Pictorial* of April

[27] IOR/L/P&J/12/412, 'Communist Training Schools', p. 9. [28] Ibid.
[29] Gardezi, *Chains to Lose*, vol. II, pp. 536–577.

1923. Published by Friends of Soviet Russia (later known as Friends of the Soviet Union) in the United States, the *Pictorial* carried an account by journalist William H. Chamberlain writing under the pseudonym of 'A.C. Freeman' on 'Russia's University of Oriental Communists'. In an extensive report (not without its fair share of orientalist stereotypes), he reported:

> 'Communist University of the Toiling East' – this inscription is written in huge letters above the entrance to a large white building near the Pushkin Monument in Moscow. All through the day one sees eastern students in all sorts of picturesque costumes going in and out of the building. There are Turkomans in high black wool hats, Sarts from Bukhara with bright embroidered caps, almond-eyed Tartars from the Volga and the Crimea, Moslem mountaineers from the Caucasus, political refugees from India, China, Japan and Korea.[30]

Freeman also reported on the challenges that came with such a diverse mix of students. There was hardly any university, he reported, that had such a 'wide variation in the mental background and previous training of its students'. From barely literate 'Muhammadan peasants from some village in the Caucuses or the Crimea, who [had] never seen a factory or a large city' to 'political refugees from China and India and Japan [with] degrees from Oxford and Heidelberg',[31] Kutva truly was a melting pot of diverse backgrounds. Dada and Naina Singh also commented on the varying levels and backgrounds of their peers. Writing of this 'unprecedented institution', Dada reported that the enrolled students were from 16 to 50 years of age, with some married with children. Educational levels varied widely as well. Some had been taught to read and write in 'Buddhist monasteries in Mongolia' while others were completely illiterate. A few were physically disabled.[32]

Not everyone, however, was welcome at Kutva. There were seemingly stringent entrance requirements in place. Before he was accepted into the university, Dada was interviewed through a translator by a panel consisting of Comintern and university representatives. Among other questions, he was asked about his 'social origins', his 'social class', his parents' occupation, his education, his history of political activism, and why he had left the United States. What seemed like a mere formality to Dada, however, could be a calamity for others, such as one Hazara Singh Hamdam, who after a long and hazardous journey to Moscow from North America (or most probably Argentina) was sent back after a mere six days because his father possessed thirty acres of land. Presumably,

[30] Gangadhar Adhikari (ed.), *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India, Volume One (1917–1922)* (People's Publishing House, 1971).
[31] Ibid., p. 244. [32] Gardezi (ed.), *Chains to Lose*, vol. II, p. 536.

that made him a 'kulak' and thus a counter-revolutionary. Had he come in the early 1920s, he might have been able to make the cut. But after the 1927 debacle in China, when the Kuomintang massacred communists in Shanghai, the Comintern lost trust in students of 'middle class origin', unless, that is, they had worked in the communist movement and had thoroughly 'declassed' themselves.[33] Still, these interviews were not without their lighter moments. Jaswant Singh Kairon, for instance – a leftist leader of some repute and brother of Pratap Singh Kairon, later Chief Minister of Indian Punjab – was reportedly asked whether he was interested in detective novels. And when asked what he would read in the university, deftly replied 'whatever you will teach'.[34] That said, it was not clear to everyone coming to Moscow that they would, of all things, be *studying*. Most were coming for military training, not for instructions in advanced political theories and Marxism–Leninism.

Once formally admitted to Kutva, students were rechristened. Their birth names would be concealed and they were to refer to each other by their new names. On the recommendation of one 'Friar', Dada was rechristened 'Sukharoff'.[35] Achhar Singh Chhina became 'Larkin', Harbans Singh 'Pepe', Bujha Singh 'Martin', Sardara Singh 'Alfredo', and Kartar Singh 'Gari'.[36] Presumably, their new avatars were intended to mislead British spies known to be in Moscow. If that was the intention, it backfired spectacularly, and not least because British intelligence was usually all too aware of their code names. Nor were the comrades careful in protecting each other's identity. Its practical significance aside, rechristening, perhaps unwittingly, also marked a symbolic death as well as a rebirth. Both had to be appropriately marked before embarking on the grandest of all global projects. A new beginning for the world also had to be accompanied by a new beginning for the self. And everything about Moscow, from the change of names to the city itself, to the gathering of peoples from every corner of the world, suggested that they were indeed part of a grand social and political experiment. It would have been difficult to feel otherwise given the scale of the transformation taking place.

In the two or three years he was in Moscow, Dada acquired a comprehensive political education. Among the few memoirs we have, his testimony is an unusually detailed account that touches on his education, military and political training, university life, and travels in the Soviet Union, all woven together with an acute consciousness of the times he

[33] Ibid., p. 717. [34] Josh, *Hindustan Ghadar Party*, vol. II, pp. 291–292.
[35] Gardezi (ed.), *Chains to Lose*, vol. II, p. 533.
[36] Josh, *Hindustan Ghadar Party*, vol. II, p. 293.

inhabited and how they had transformed him as an individual. There is also distinct sense of pride at work in the way he speaks of his knowledge of Marxism–Leninism, history, and the social sciences. For their preparatory course, for example, Dada and his Indian compatriots received lessons in Russian and an 'outline' of political geography, economic geography, and anthropology. These were supplemented by a daily reading and discussion of newspapers to acquaint themselves 'with the daily political events and various struggles which were taking place in those memorable days'.[37] In more advanced courses, Dada learnt about the history of the CPSU and the Soviet Union, histories of the First, Second, and Third Internationals, revolutionary histories of 'Western Europe', histories of imperialism, Marxist political economy, Leninism, the Soviet state, its economic policy and first Five-Year Plan, and, last but not least, 'military science'. It was no coincidence that an in-depth study of history dominated the curriculum. History had to be disciplined and learnt from for a project invested in the future. It is a point that Dada implicitly makes again and again as he demonstrates his grasp of the lessons he learnt, particularly when it came to the instructive lessons that history offered to aspiring revolutionaries. That said, it seems that Dada was one of the few Indians who received advanced instruction at Kutva. He was, self-professedly, one of the few who acquired a high degree of fluency in Russian. Some had to work through translators. Others reported studying from Soviet professors fluent in Punjabi, Hindi, and Urdu. This made their education all the more enriching. It also made it easier. But more than language, it was the material they studied that resonated with them. For another revolutionary, Bhagat Singh Bilga, Indian comrades found it 'easy' to study in Moscow. They were, after all, studying their 'life stories'.[38]

However, the political and educational training of Indian revolutionaries could not have been complete unless they had learnt how to fire a gun. Over the summer, recruits were required to attend a 'summer camp' where they learnt from Red Army officers the techniques of handling rifles, light and heavy machine guns, pistols, revolvers, and hand grenades. They were also taught the finer details of warfare, military tactics, and mapmaking.[39] Role play was also part of their training. Frequently,

[37] Gardezi (ed.), *Chains to Lose*, vol. II, p. 539.
[38] Excerpted, translated, and transcribed by Amarjit Chandan from Bhagat Singh Bilga, *Ghadar Lehar de Anfoley Varkey: Ghadar Party te Kirti Party 1908–1952* (Desh Bhagat Yadgar Committee, 1989).
[39] Ibid., p. 553. Also see Dhoot, *The Political Memoirs*, p. 115.

they were made to act as commanders and assigned specific tasks such as destroying an 'enemy installation with the help of a contingent of soldiers, arms, maps, etc.'. Outside of their summer regimen, students were lectured by activists of the Bolshevik Party. Sharing their experiences, these activists focused on the method, techniques, and strategies necessary for carrying out 'revolutionary struggles' and in particular 'secret work'. They also discussed how political workers could survive the most trying and adverse circumstances, especially in jails.[40] Given what awaited them in India, this was presumably the most useful part of their education.

This was very much par for the course as far as the Soviet Union's support for revolutionaries was concerned. Other revolutionaries, especially from China, were also trained in a similar fashion. The *Muhajirin* too had been taught military tactics in the short-lived Tashkent school, including, allegedly, flying. For obvious reasons, this part of their training was of far greater concern to the imperial authorities than relatively sedate academic pursuits. For revolutionaries like Dada,

> the purpose of universal military training … was to prepare a class- conscious cadre who on being confronted with an objective revolutionary situation might be obliged to use arms against counter revolutionary forces, as it had happened in pre-revolutionary Czarist Russia, in post-war European countries after 1918, and at that time in China.[41]

However, there was much more to student life in Moscow than education and military camps. Foreign students were frequently taken on 'educational excursions', to art galleries, theatres – including the famed Bolshoi – museums, historical sites, factories, and the Kremlin. For Dada, these field trips were 'one of the most memorable and informative parts' of his education. His most illuminating field trip came in the spring of 1928, when his cohort was taken to Leningrad (now St Petersburg) to visit the famous sites of the 1917 Revolution. In what reads like a solemn pilgrimage, Dada and his comrades visited the many sites associated with the revolution, including the Winter Palace and the 'Kripra Pauls Fortress' (Peter and Paul Fortress), which stood as a testament to Tsarist tyranny and cruelty.[42] The purpose of these trips was clear. Beyond light entertainment and recreation, such trips worked to build bonds between foreign recruits while impressing upon them the glorious journey and advancements of the Revolution. This was Soviet showcasing at its very best.

[40] Dhoot, *The Political Memoirs*, p. 115.
[41] Gardezi, *Chains to Lose*, vol. II, p. 596.
[42] Ibid., pp. 573, 596–597.

At the same time, experiences and encounters beyond the organized routine of university and camp life could also be instructive, and at times personally transformative. It is here that perhaps the most significant impact of the revolutionaries' sojourn comes through. In the summer of 1927, for instance, Dada, along with an African American comrade by the name of Harry Haywood, was sent to the Crimea for convalescing. The Moscow cold, along with overwork, had taken its toll. Housed in a rest house by the beach in Yalta, Dada and Haywood spent their days resting, swimming, and sunbathing. Evenings were taken up by cafés, musical performances, and films. While their skin colour made them objects of interest, they were reportedly fêted by their hosts and ordinary people. To Dada, Russian people, and Russian women in particular, seemed to have 'a soft and affectionate disposition towards Indians'. Even more surprising was the relaxed attitude towards public nudity, with nude sunbathing common on beaches. On one occasion, he also went skinny dipping with a German couple, his first time in the presence of the 'opposite sex'.[43]

It is difficult to overstate the significance of these seemingly trivial incidents. For Dada, these experiences were linked to a world that was far different from – and far better than – the one he was accustomed to. It was also a world in which the unthinkable became almost normal. This was especially true for gender and sexual relations. In between his all-too-brief mentions of the time he spent with his 'many girl friends', Dada spoke approvingly of the advances women had made under the Soviet system. Speaking of women students in a nursing students hostel he used to frequent, Dada noted how they came from ethnically diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds. Many were orphans from the civil war and the 'abnormal' socio-economic conditions of preceding years. They had been placed by the Soviet authorities in children's homes and were now undergoing training in a nursing school. Most were also members of the Young Communists League (Komsomols). By any measure, this was an impressive achievement.[44]

While Moscow was a centre for communist women from across the Soviet Union and elsewhere, we know of only one Indian woman who attended Kutva or lived in Moscow for any appreciable amount of time. Born to a politically active family and a younger sister of Sarojini Naidu and Virendranath Chattopadhyay, Suhashini Chattopadhyay also attended Kutva around the time Dada was in Moscow. At the age of 18, Suhasini had married A.C.N. Nambiar – who later made a name for

[43] Ibid., pp. 582–584. [44] Ibid., pp. 606–607.

himself as Subhas Chandra Bose's lieutenant in Nazi Germany – and followed him to Berlin in the mid-1920s. Through her contacts with the German communist party, she reached the Soviet Union and enrolled at Kutva. On her return to India in 1928 – reportedly as a stowaway on a boat – she joined the Communist Party of India, becoming the first woman to do so. She later emerged as a prominent member of the communist party.[45] Very little, however, is known of Suhasini's experiences in Moscow. Dada for his part, only fleetingly referred to her, if only to note her popularity as the first Indian female student at the university.[46]

While Dada did not elaborate on this question at length, his observations on the advances women had made under the revolution kept in line with Soviet claims on ushering in an unparalleled era of progress for women. Debates on the 'New Woman' and women's equality were part and parcel of discussions within the Comintern and assorted communist parties. In its detailed thesis on the 'Methods and Forms of Work among Communist Party Women', the 1921 Third Congress of the Communist International noted that without the 'active participation' of proletarian women, the proletariat could 'nether seize power nor realize communism'. At the same time, it claimed that the liberation of women 'from centuries of enslavement, lack of rights and inequality [was] possible *only through the victory of Communism*'.[47] 'Bourgeois women's movement', it added, was 'completely incapable of guaranteeing women that which Communism gives.' What that meant was that there was no 'special women's question' and that the emancipation of women was subordinate, and indeed contingent, on the success of a 'single and indivisible' proletarian struggle. Put simply, class trumped gender. That said, the Congress did recognize that different contexts required different approaches to this question. To that end, it issued specific instructions to communist parties from separate blocs. For instance, in its instructions to communist parties from 'economically backward countries', also referred to as 'the East', the Congress called for a 'fight' against 'all prejudices and all religious and secular customs that oppress women'.[48]

Still, for all its support for women's emancipation, and a thundering warning that 'to be against the Third International [was] to be an enemy of the liberation of women',[49] there were significant barriers to substantive

[45] See Vimla Dang, *Fragments of an Autobiography*, pp. 121–132 for a detailed biographical sketch. Also see Ania Loomba, *Revolutionary Desires*, pp. 244–248.
[46] Gardezi, *Chains to Lose*, vol. II, p. 606. [47] Emphasis in original.
[48] 'Methods and Forms of Work among Communist Party Women: Theses', 8 July 1921, www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/3rd-congress/women-theses.htm.
[49] Ibid.

equality. Scholars have noted how women, despite being indispensable for the functioning of communist parties and the Comintern, were nevertheless 'relegated to subaltern functions'. In fact, there were 'hardly any women in party and Comintern leaderships'. In the Soviet sexual division of labour, far more women were found in administrative positions than leadership ones. There were other problems too, from domestic arrangements to the masculinist tone of Soviet propaganda.[50] There were, to be sure, radical attempts at rethinking the question of feminism by revolutionaries such as Alexandra Kollontai,[51] but those initiatives were increasingly tempered over successive years.[52]

As far as Dada was concerned, however, the progress that women had made in the Soviet Union was remarkable. But even more remarkable for him was the apparent colour-blindness of the Bolshevik Revolution. Race was crucial to the way that non-white and non-European revolutionaries saw the Soviet Union. For Dada and other coloured revolutionaries, socialist and communist internationalism offered the possibility – perhaps the only possibility – of evening and overturning a world riven with racial hierarchies. Their firm conviction withstood the opposition that many developed against the Soviet Union under Stalinism. It was a conviction that was echoed by black writers, artists, activists and revolutionaries alike. Irrespective of their divergent and evolving opinions, it is a point made in varying degrees by luminaries like Langston Hughes, C.L.R. James, Robert Robinson, Paul Robeson, Richard Wright and others.[53]

[50] See for example Brigitte Studer, *The Transnational World of the Cominternians* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 41–45.

[51] Kollontai, in particular, had radically different ideas on love, sex, and familial relationships. An extraordinary figure within the Russian socialist and communist movement, Kollontai left behind a rich, and frequently misunderstood, legacy of radical feminism. For an excellent biographical account, see Cathy Porter, *Alexandra Kollontai: A Biography* (Haymarket Books, 2014). See her archive of writings, www.marxists.org/archive/kollonta/index.htm, in particular her autobiography, 'The Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Communist Woman' and her theses on 'Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle' and the 'New Woman'.

[52] In *Transnational World of the Cominternians* Studer provides an excellent account of how Soviet and Comintern debates on the 'New Woman' evolved over the interwar period. Also see Sheila Fitzpatrick and Yuri Slezkine (eds.), *In the Shadow of Revolution: Life Stories of Russian Women from 1917 to the Second World War* (Princeton University Press, 2000). While not directly addressing the question of women's equality within the Comintern or the communist party, this is an extraordinary volume that documents testimonies of women from diverse ethnic, professional, socio-economic, and political backgrounds. More recently, Julia L. Mickenberg has provided an excellent account of revolutionary women from the United States in the USSR in *American Girls in Red Russia: Chasing the Soviet Dream* (University of Chicago Press, 2017).

[53] As an illustrative example, see Robert Robinson, *Black on Red: My 44 Years inside the Soviet Union* (Acropolis Books, 1988), and especially the autobiography of leading African American communist and intellectual, Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik:*

African American poet Claude McKay, for example, writes in his riveting memoir, *A Long Way from Home*, how 'all [he] had was the dominant urge to go'. 'Millions of ordinary human beings and thousands of writers', he added, 'were stirred by the Russian thunder rolling round the world.' And as a 'social-minded being and a poet', he too was profoundly moved. While McKay was refreshingly critical of the Soviet revolution, he nevertheless felt inspired enough to write that 'never before' had he felt 'prouder of being an African, a black, and no mistake about it'.[54] As a delegate to the Fourth Congress of the Communist International in 1922, where the 'black question' was discussed at length,[55] McKay was fêted by the Soviets as an honoured guest. Among his other engagements, he met Leon Trotsky, and the who's who of international communism, including Grigory Zinoviev, Nikolai Bukharin, Karl Radek, Clara Zetkin, and M.N. Roy. He also gave speeches to Soviet military officers and cadets, toured barracks and military schools, and met with delegates from Egypt, India, Japan, China, and Algeria.[56] For a Jamaican poet from Harlem, this was truly an extraordinary set of circumstances.

McKay's sentiments were echoed by Dada's *Amerikanski Negrochanski tovarishi* ('American Negro comrades').[57] This was something he was in a good position to observe. All non-Soviet students had been grouped into national and/or linguistic groups for organizational, political, and communal purposes. Dada, along with his Indian comrades, had been grouped with their African American comrades from the United States. In public, the colour and appearance of his comrades made them objects

Autobiography of an Afro-American Communist (University of Minnesota Press, 1978). Also see Barbara Keys, 'An African American Worker in Stalin's Soviet Union: Race and the Soviet Experiment in International Perspective', *The Historian* 71, 1 (Spring 2009), 31–54, and Gerald Horne, *Paul Robeson: The Artist as Revolutionary* (Pluto Press, 2016). For other scholarly accounts on Communist Internationalism and Pan-African and Black radicalism, see in particular Hakim Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Communist International, Africa and the Diaspora, 1919–1939* (Africa World Press, 2013); Minkah Makalini, *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917–1939* (University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (University of North Carolina Press, 2000); C.L.R. James, *World Revolution, 1917–1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International* (Duke University Press, 2017). James's work is a contemporaneous, and highly critical, account of the promise of the Communist International and its disastrous (as he saw it) trajectory under Stalinism. See https://www.marxists.org/archive/james-clr/works/world/.

[54] Claude McKay, *A Long Way from Home* (Rutgers University Press, 2007), pp. 121, 132.

[55] See, 'Black Question', 30 November 1922, Fourth Congress of the Communist International, www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/4th-congress/blacks.htm.

[56] McKay, *A Long Way from* Home, pp. 121–148.

[57] David Chioni Moore, 'Langston Hughes in Central Asia', http://steppemagazine.com/articles/langston-hughes-in-central-asia/.

of curiosity and unwanted attention. And yet, for Dada, their condition in Moscow was indisputably better than in the United States. For one, his 'Negro comrades' were often seen walking 'arm in arm with Russian girls', with some even inviting them home 'for tea'. Back in the American South, Dada noted, this 'offence' would most likely have ended with a lynching.[58] Moscow therefore, offered freedoms and opportunities unimaginable in the United States. Indeed, given their fondness for women, the Indo-American comrades were accused by their peers of being 'more interested in studying women than revolutionary Marxism or the revolutionary experience'. Their purpose in coming from 'such distant parts of the world', they were reminded, was to 'receive training in revolutionary Marxism–Leninism, and to learn from the revolutionary experience of the great Bolshevik Party'.[59]

Sexual and racial relations were not the only social conventions that were inverted. Conventional class and status markers were also overturned. In Moscow, both became an advantage for Dada and his Indian compatriots. It was all heady stuff. Anointed as agents of change, of History itself, treated as representatives of India, of an India in exile, as leaders of a revolutionary struggle that would storm to victory, Dada, Naina Singh and others would have never imagined their otherwise ordinary and mundane lives changing so dramatically. As Indian revolutionaries, they also met the elite of Indian émigrés, exiles, and revolutionaries whose journeys inevitably crossed through Moscow. Dada, for instance, recounts meeting the ubiquitous M.N. Roy, Rattan Singh (the roving Ghadarite emissary), Raja Mahendra Pratap (of the disastrous Tibetan expedition and religion of love fame), Clemens Palme Dutt (British–Indian communist and brother of a more illustrious sibling, Rajani Palme Dutt) and Muhammad Ali Sepassi (former '*jihadi*', M.N. Roy's 'lieutenant', 'Major General' of the 'Army of God' of the 'Provisional Government of India' in Afghanistan, member of the communist party in Berlin and Moscow, and victim of a Nazi execution squad in 1940).[60] Among the more respectable visiting Indians were Jawaharlal and Motilal Nehru, who journeyed to Moscow on the tenth anniversary of the Revolution (though Dada does not seem to have personally met them).[61] Nor were Dada's engagements restricted to Indians alone. Among other luminaries, he also met 'Big Bill' Haywood, founder of the Industrial Workers of the World, and the famous novelist

[58] Gardezi, *Chains to Lose*, vol. II, pp. 542–546. [59] Ibid., p. 549.
[60] For a brief but fascinating insight into 'Sepassi's' movements during the interwar period, see L/P&J/12/194 'Muhammad Ali alias Khushi Muhammad alias … Sepassi'.
[61] Gardezi (ed.), *Chains to Lose*, vol. II, pp. 543, 570–571, 602.

Theodore Dreiser.[62] But his encounters were nothing compared to those of Shaukat Usmani, who claimed to have met Stalin himself.[63] Few could have imagined their fortunes changing so dramatically. Indeed, how could an ordinary lascar, factory worker or farmhand have imagined that he would represent India in the most important of all theatres? Who could have conceived proudly marching down Moscow's boulevards in one parade after another? And while it is true that other Indians – Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, M.N. Roy and others – had met equally illustrious figures and occupied senior positions in the Comintern, they were still relatively more privileged then Dada and his compatriots. By any measure, this was an incredible story of achievement and self-transformation.

Ghadar Reinvented

It is difficult to assess how many Indians managed to make their way to Moscow. While remarkable for their wealth of information, the archival sources we have are fragmented, incomplete, and occasionally inaccurate. What is clear, though, is that the largest contingent of Indians was provided by the Ghadar Party. The Party sent successive batches to the Soviet Union once it had established a firm relationship with the Comintern. According to Naina Singh Dhoot, the Comintern approached the Ghadar Party in a bid to re-establish its links with India after M.N. Roy had been expelled from the organization in 1929 in the fallout from the debacle in China. As before, contact between the two was facilitated by the CPUSA.[64] An intelligence report from 1933, while largely supporting Dhoot's version, added a further twist in its assessment of the rapprochement between the two:

> For years the Communist International, largely on the advice of MN Roy and other Bengalis, who had no use whatever for the Sikhs, declined to have anything to do with the Ghadar Party, but latterly this policy has been reversed and the Communist International has undoubtedly been attracted no less by the Ghadr Party's openly and consistently avowed policy of violence than by the extremely successful way in which the Party can raise funds from its supporters. Hitherto the Communist International, apart from meeting the entire cost incurred in

[62] Ibid., pp. 604–605. His other claims are less believable. He wrote, for example, of meeting a 'Polish woman, Rosa Luxemburg' and 'Karl Liebnecrt' (presumably Karl Liebknecht), p. 558. Both had been executed in 1919 after the failed Spartacist uprising. That said, this could also be down to an editing error.

[63] He wrote a slim book about it afterwards. See Shaukat Usmani, *I Met Stalin Twice* (1953).

[64] Dhoot, *The Political Memoirs*, p. 106.

connection with the students sent to Moscow, has refused to finance the Ghadar Party (which, owing to the economic situation in the USA, is passing through a critical period), but Isher Singh now states that finds have been supplied to him for the work in India.[65]

That Isher Singh was none other than the ubiquitous Rattan Singh. Viewed by imperial intelligence as 'one of the most active and dangerous leaders of the Ghadr movement', Rattan Singh, alias Santa Singh, alias Hari Singh, alias Isher Singh, alias Ghulam Muhammad, was one of the most extraordinary amongst a cast of larger-than-life characters operating in this period. A roving revolutionary *par excellence*, Rattan Singh's reports make for dizzying and breathless reading. He commands a phantasmal presence in the archives, cropping up frequently, but never in the same location, in contemporary accounts, memoirs, consular reports, and intelligence memos. At times, it is nearly impossible to track him through reports filed from British outposts across the Empire and beyond as they frantically try to keep up with his movements along with his various guises and faked travel documents.[66] All that paperwork, however, comes together, however tenuously and speculatively, in the Ghadar Directory, issued in 1933. Singh's entry in the 'directory' marks one of the first attempts at concisely compiling his itinerant and seditious past, with his itinerancy frequently being equated with sedition. His entry informs us that Rattan Singh was born in the village of Raipur Doaba [*sic*] – Raipur Dabba – in District Jullundur sometime in 1886–1887. He first emigrated to Fiji in 1904 and later to Vancouver in 1907. In the following decade, he made a name for himself as a prominent Ghadarite in North America, which included a brief stint in Hong Kong. In 1922, in an attempt to establish a connection with the Comintern, he, along with another comrade, Santokh Singh, travelled to Moscow to attend the Fourth Congress of the Communist International. Thereafter, his alleged travels, whether on the run or a new mission, make for fascinating reading and are worth reproducing in fuller measure.

Left Russia for India via Persia in May 1923 and while Santokh Singh was arrested in the NWF [North West Frontier Province], he was believed to have gone back to America … Active in 1925/26 in a combined effort to resuscitate the Ghadr Party, and trying to raise funds for the purchase of arms to be eventually used in India. Escaped to Mexico in 1925 to avoid deportation. Early in 1926 was

[65] IOR/L/P&J/12/148, 'Anglo-Soviet Relations: Communist Propaganda in India; Relationship between the Comintern and the Ghadr Party', P&J (S) 834 1933, pp. 2–3.

[66] See for instance IOR/L/P&J/12/287 and 288, 'Activities of Gurmukh Singh and Rattan Singh, alias Isher Singh' I and II.

in Northern Italy associating with disaffected Indian Moslems, and in April joined MN Roy in Russia. Visited Punjab undetected about the middle of 1926 and went to China after a futile attempt to recruit young men for military training in Russia, Germany and Turkey. Sent a few young men from America to study in Moscow and Angora. From China, he came to Afghanistan and about the middle of 1927 left America with Gurmukh Singh via Europe. Was in Berlin with M.N. Roy in March 1928, and writing articles to the 'Kirti' extolling the success of the communist movement in Russia. Mobilized the discordant parties on his arrival in Hankow in June 1928, and reorganized seditious plans. Wrote articles to the 'Kirti' preaching rank communism extolling assassination of Government officials in India. Visited Japan in August 1928, but was deported by the Japanese Government as a communist. Left China for Moscow in July to attend the conference of the Chinese, Russian, and Japanese delegates held in October 1928. Visited Panama during the winter of 1928–29 and collected money for the Ghadar Party. In the middle of 1929 joined Gurmukh Singh in the latter's attempt to reach India from Kabul but the scheme fell through owing to the revolution in Afghanistan. Represented the Ghadr Party in the 2nd session of the League Against Imperialism at Frankfurt, Germany, in July 1929, and made a speech denouncing British Imperialists and threatening an armed revolt. Submitted a lengthy report to the League describing the objects of the Ghadr Party and stating that they were responsible for the attempted revolution in the Punjab in 1914–15. Subsequently left for Mexico. In January 1930, he was reported to have arrived in the USA and to have stayed in Fabens, Texas … on the Texas–Mexican border. Was in South America in 1930 organizing a branch of the Ghadr Party in that area. Was anxious to foment revolution in India, and taking advantage of the rising of the Frontier tribes, arrived in Kabul in December 1930. Was ordered to leave Kabul on 3rd August 1931. Left Kabul for Russia by air on 2nd November 1931 and pledged himself to assist ex-King Amanullah in regaining the throne. While in Moscow was in close touch with the notorious communist Muhammad Ali *alias* Sepassi and Chattopadhyaya. Wrote … from Germany on 18th February in 1932, stating that he would remain in Germany till the middle of 1932, and that he would send a fountain pen instead of a wrist watch which the latter had asked for, probably insinuating that the Kirtis must acquaint themselves with the use of firearms. He attended the anti-War Congress in Amsterdam in the autumn of 1932 … He left Geneva for Moscow in November 1932 but returned again in February 1933. Latterly interested himself in sending young men to Moscow for training in communist propaganda. He is in Germany at present …[67]

All this makes for gripping and incredible reading. Rattan Singh appears as an apparition, as much a product of colonial paranoia as of a global revolutionary circuit that traversed and disobeyed imperial geographies

[67] IOR/V/27/262/6, 'The Ghadr Directory: Containing the names of persons who have taken in the Ghadr movement in America, Europe, Africa and Afghanistan as well as in India', compiled by Intelligence Bureau, Home Department, Government of India (New Delhi, 1934), pp. 250–252.

with deceptive ease. Not much is known of his movements after the late 1930s, which is when he mysteriously disappears from the colonial record. Eventually, he resurfaces in Italy, where he reportedly dies of tuberculosis in Rome in 1943. As far as the account above is concerned, there is no way of knowing whether it is entirely factual or not, not least because a few bits do not quite add up, but it is still an account that was culled from hundreds of reports and, potentially, considered the most authoritative by colonial intelligence. Moreover, the fantastical schemes and seemingly mad attempts highlighted therein are also echoed in accounts by revolutionaries. Rather than dismissing them as products of a fevered imagination it is worth considering these schemes as products of a moment in which anything, and everything, seemed possible. Indeed, they could only have seemed possible at this time and in this moment. It was this history of possibilities that was central to revolutionary thought and practice. And given the consternation caused by the movements of a few individuals, it seems that the imperial machinery was equally struck by the power of this possibility. As one intelligence report dryly commented on another similar figure, '[he] is clearly one of those who believes that the visionary of today is the realist of tomorrow'.[68]

As one of his ambitious schemes, Rattan Singh arranged for the transfer of Ghadarites from Punjabi diasporas around the world. This was how Naina Singh Dhoot came to be recruited in Rosario, Argentina. Like others, his journey to Moscow had been funded by generous donations from Punjabi workers. Had this plan not materialized, there were reportedly other schemes for buying land in Argentina for 'military training'.[69] Joining Rattan Singh in this enterprise were cadres from the United States, Canada, Panama, Brazil, New Zealand, East Africa, Fiji and indeed India. The first batch of students sent by Rattan Singh included (future) luminaries such as Teja Singh Swatantar, Achhar Singh Chhina, Bhagat Singh Bilga, and Iqbal Singh Hundal. Each individual later went on to occupy prominent positions in the communist movement. For Dhoot, this marked a shift of the Ghadar Party from the 'ideology of terrorism based on individual action' to a 'path of socialist revolution to be brought about by the mass movement of peasants and workers'. 'In this way', he recounted, the Party 'was given a Marxist orientation,'[70] even though that shift had arguably begun much earlier with Santokh Singh and Rattan Singh's trip to the Soviet Union.

[68] A.K. Mukhopadhyay (ed.), *India and Communism: Secret British Documents* (National Book Agency, 1997; originally published 1935), p. 220.
[69] IOR/L/P&J/12/148 'Anglo-Soviet Relations', p. 8.
[70] Dhoot, *Political Memoirs*, pp. 106–107.

How many were they? It is difficult to get a sense from the competing claims and mixed reports we have. Between 1931 and 1933, thirty-five Ghadar students arrived in the Soviet Union from around the world for a crash course in revolution. Communist leader Sohan Singh Josh, in his history of the Hindustan Ghadar Party, helpfully gives a more comprehensive list of Ghadar cadres who went to the Soviet Union. His list stands at eighty. Other researchers have put that figure at ninety.[71] All were men. Barring a few exceptions, including a 'Tamil Madrassi', a 'Bengali', and a 'Gujrati', all were Punjabi Sikhs. The overwhelming majority came from the same districts in central Punjab.[72] In Naina Singh's 'batch', for instance, all members were from the Doaba. In an all-too-familiar story, all were from small landowning peasant families. Most had mortgaged their land for their emigration to more lucrative climes.[73]

Unlike Dada, who had a history with the Communist Party in the United States, not everyone knew what lay in store in Moscow. As Dhoot acknowledged, their understanding of 'Marxism', or even the Bolshevik Revolution, was exceedingly limited. Indeed, some had assumed that the Red Army they had read about in Ghadar literature was called such because its soldiers were clad in red. Most were driven by their feverish determination to sacrifice their *tan*, *man*, *dhan* (body, soul, wealth) for the liberation of India.[74] It came as quite a shock to some when they were handed paper and pencil by Rattan Singh in Berlin and told to learn to read and write. 'Do you want to make *patwaris* (accountants) of us?' they jokingly asked Rattan Singh.[75] They had dreamt of militant struggle, of glorious battles, of revolutionary terrorism, even martyrdom perchance, not books and dense theories.

Perhaps this was why the Comintern was reportedly displeased with the 'quality' of the students they were getting. Students from India were considered of far poorer quality than those coming from the Americas. Indeed, the crisis became so acute at one point that the Comintern reportedly ordered the cessation of further recruitment in India until someone trustworthy could be appointed to 'vet' prospective candidates.[76] Similar concerns had also been expressed by communist luminaries like Sohan Singh Josh and Dada Amir Haider Khan. Despite their intensive training and education, a fair number of Moscow graduates

[71] In an unpublished list, Amarjit Chandan has documented ninety members of the Ghadar/Kirti Party who went to Moscow.
[72] Josh, *Hindustan Ghadar Party*, vol. II, Appendix 10, pp. 330–332.
[73] Dhoot, *Political Memoirs*, pp. 108–109. [74] Ibid., pp. 86, 100–101.
[75] Ibid., p. 109.
[76] IOR/L/P&J/12/148, 'Anglo-Soviet Relations: Communist Propaganda in India', 'Weekly Report: Foreign Intelligence Simla', 22.6.33, p. 11.

were simply not considered to be effective or committed cadres. Neither were they viewed as 'proper' communists, especially by individuals like Josh, who was later a member the CPI's 'Official Group' in the Punjab. A key to why this was could be gleaned from an intelligence report that commented on the Indian students in Moscow in the following way:

> It is generally considered that these have not been a great success, the type which has hitherto come forward, or been selected having proved too idealistic, or else more concerned with the Nationalist movement in India itself than with the larger issue of world revolution.[77]

Still, this did not deter the Comintern from continuing its efforts in other arenas as well, whether through wireless broadcasts into India, tentative incursions in Burma, anti-British 'intrigues' in Afghanistan and Persia, or any one among many such similarly fanciful schemes.[78] Nor did it prevent other organizations from vying to build their own contacts with the Comintern. In the Punjab, for instance, the Kisan Sabha, rival to the Ghadar Party's Punjab affiliate the Kirti Kisan Sabha (see Chapter 4), made plans for dispatching their cadres to Moscow via Afghanistan. Meanwhile, other Indian communist groups in London and Bengal sought to solicit the Comintern's favour.[79] Jockeying for the Comintern's support was usual as far as Indian intra-left politics was concerned. There was much prestige, authority, and support to be gained by being anointed as India's representative communist body and being able to claim themselves as a 'section of the Communist International'. Not that that was ever an entirely clear-cut matter. Indeed, over the 1930s, the Comintern recognized both the Ghadar/Kirti Kisan Party and the Communist Party of India as the official communist groups in India, which was quite unusual given that each country was, in theory at least, supposed to have only one communist party.

After the completion of their 'course', arrangements were made for students to return to their territories, except for those who had been selected, like Naina Singh, for further training and education. For the most part, though, imperial intelligence and security services were fully aware of who was returning to India from the Soviet Union. As a result, many Ghadarites were traced and arrested once they managed to reach India. A fair number, despite their training in withstanding duress, succumbed to police torture and betrayed their comrades along with

[77] IOR/L/P&J/12/412, 'Communist Training Schools for Indians in Moscow and Tashkent', 'Letter from Sir E Ovey to Mr. A Henderson', 7 July 1930, p. 1.
[78] Ibid., 'Letter from Home Department, GOI to Peel (sec of State?)', 8 January 1934, p. 50.
[79] Ibid., 'Letter 3.8.33', p. 4.

the secrets they were sworn to keep.[80] For Naina Singh, one (alleged) culprit was Karam Singh Dhuieta, who revealed to the CID the route his batch took to get to Moscow and from there to India.[81] This naturally made it more difficult for the Comintern to arrange safe passage for revolutionaries to make their way to Moscow, and, more importantly, back to India.

For that reason, Dada had to go to extraordinary lengths in getting back to India. Leaving Moscow had not been easy. The two or so years he had spent there had left with him with fond memories of intimate relationships, shared struggles, and transformative experiences. But there was a higher calling. He had been away from India for more than a decade, and he could have chosen to return to the United States where he felt most at home. Nor had India given him an education, a 'normal childhood', or for that matter, anything of worth. But it was the land of his birth. And for that reason, he felt he owed his 'duty and allegiance' to her.[82] After obtaining permission and his required paperwork from the Comintern, he left Moscow for Leningrad. From there, he went to Hamburg, where he waited for an opportunity to board a liner heading for India. Hamburg in 1928 was a city marked by political and intellectual ferment. It was also overrun by spies, counterspies, and revolutionaries either returning or en route to the Soviet Union. For that reason, he was constantly on guard. His sole refuge was a café run by an undercover Indian revolutionary who had been captured as a POW in the First World War and had switched sides under the influence of the Berlin India Committee. There, he also met other Indian revolutionaries returning from the Soviet Union. Eventually, he found work as a coal passer on a vessel bound for India via the Suez Canal. On reaching Bombay in September 1928, Dada immediately visited the office of the Workers and Peasants Party, where he presented his Comintern credentials – typed on a piece of silk stitched inside his coat sleeve – to comrades Ben Bradley, S.A. Dange, and S.V. Ghate, the leading lights of Indian communism at the time.[83] After ten years and more, Dada was finally home.[84]

[80] One of the most prominent figures who was systematically broken in this way was Harminder Singh Sodhi.

[81] Dhoot, *Political Memoirs*, p. 116. [82] Ibid., pp. 613–619. [83] Ibid., pp. 620–643.

[84] His stay, however, was short-lived. Shortly after he had started working and organizing in a factory, he came to the notice of the police, who had intercepted his correspondence with Comintern agents. Consequently, he was named as one of the principal accused in the famed Meerut Conspiracy Case. Forever on the run from the authorities, Dada briefly visited the Soviet Union twice in quick succession where he briefed the Comintern on the political situation in India. Eventually, he managed to make his way to South India where he worked for a few years until he was finally arrested in 1936. See the final chapter of Gardezi, *Chains to Lose*, vol. II.

On Imperfect Dreams

Dada, however, was fortunate in that his arrival went unnoticed by the authorities. Others were not so lucky. In the autumn of 1922, six years before Dada reached Bombay, eight men were arrested in the princely state of Chitral, located in the northwestern-most reaches of the Indian subcontinent. They had managed to cross the forbidding Pamirs on their way back from Russia. They had initially been part of the *hijrat* movement, but after throwing in their lot with the Bolsheviks they had spent two years learning 'revolutionary propaganda' in Tashkent and Moscow before being sent to India to 'act as secret agents and propagandists for the revolution'.[85] In Moscow, they had learnt the standard subjects at Kutva: 'Socialism, Materialism, World Politics, Labour Organization and other similar subjects'.[86] In Tashkent they had undergone military training at the short-lived 'school' for revolutionaries that was shut down in 1921 under the terms of the Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement. They were also initiated into communism by M.N. Roy. The details of their training aside, their interrogation revealed a very different picture of Moscow, and one that stands in stark contrast to the accounts presented by Dada, Dhoot, and Usmani.

One of the prisoners, Habib Ahmed, gave his interrogators details of their military training, which included the theory and practice of musketry, machine guns, and field guns. This was in addition to an incomplete training in aviation. But he also recounted how they had half-heartedly told their Bolshevik handlers that they had 'converted' to the 'theories of Bolshevism' after having 'read pamphlets on the subject'. 'We did this', he claimed, 'because there was no other way by which we could live.'[87] Another, Abdul Kadar, claimed that 'all the time we really wished to get home'. 'I do not think', he said, 'that any of the batch of boys with whom I have come are convinced Communists, but they do … intend to join in political movements against the British Government.'[88] Others offered critiques of the Bolshevik system. One Akbar Shah, for instance, spoke of how Bolshevik propaganda of equality and eliminating the distinction between rich and poor would carry little weight elsewhere. 'I do not think', he said, 'that this argument will carry much weight with local *zamindars* and I do not intend to preach it.' In any case, the

[85] IOL/Political and Sect. Department/1040/1922, 'Indian Revolutionaries Intercepted enroute from Russia to India', 'Letter from Chief Commissioner NWFP to Foreign Secretary of the GOI dated 26th December, 1922', p. 1.
[86] Ibid., 'Supplementary Statement of Sultan Mohammad', p. 29.
[87] Ibid., 'Statement of Habib Ahmed', pp. 6–7.
[88] Ibid., 'Statement of Abdul Kadar', p. 20.

distinction between rich and poor was as pronounced in Moscow as it was anywhere else. After all, 'a loaf of bread cost thousands of roubles, but there were crowds of people driving about in motor cars'.[89] But the final world went to Fida Ali, who in his desperate plea summed up what many of his fellow prisoners had been trying to express:

> I have had a wretched time in Russia and have always wanted to return, but there was no means of livelihood except by doing what the Bolsheviks told us. Consequently, I went with others to Moscow. The lectures and the books we were given to read in the University were too advanced for me to understand … All the *muhajirin* in Moscow were desperate for a living, but all were thoroughly discontented and anxious to get home. [M.N.] Roy used to discuss Communism with us in Tashkent and also in Moscow, but we never accepted the principles or took any oath; neither I nor the other students did. The Russians feed everybody free and do not press them to become Communists, but the food is very bad. As I left Moscow before the others, I do not know what instructions they got, but in all our talk on the road they never said anything except how thankful they were to be getting out of Russia.[90]

How does one read these testimonies? That they were coerced, through torture or otherwise, is an obvious enough remark to make. The men were all, in their own ways, trying to evade colonial justice and punishment. If that was their hope, it did not work. All, in addition to the other batches of returning *muhajirin*, were tried and convicted in the Peshawar Conspiracy Cases. The pithy comments by IB officials at the end of each testimony also gave a clue into how their prisoners reacted at the time of their interrogation. For instance, the note accompanying Abdul Kader's statement read, 'A boy still, but with all his wits about him, frightened and more inclined to be truthful than the others'.[91] For Fida Ali, the interrogator noted how after a certain point 'he obviously [stuck] his toes in and [began] to refuse information'.[92] Others made a better impression on their interrogators. Writing of F.D. Mansur, later to become one of the beacons of the Indian communist movement, his interrogator noted how he showed 'signs of very through teaching in many ways. His topographical knowledge and memory for places and things he has seen is remarkable in an Indian and convinces me that he has been carefully trained for intelligence work.'[93]

Needless to suggest, these testimonies stood in stark contrast to the statements given by the *muhajirin* to their Bolshevik interlocutors. In an

[89] Ibid., 'Statement of Akbar Shah', n.p.
[90] Ibid., 'Supplementary statement of Fida Ali', pp. 22–23.
[91] Ibid., 'Statement of Abdul Kadar', p. 21.
[92] Ibid., 'Supplementary statement of Fida Ali', p. 26.
[93] Ibid., 'Statement of Feroze Din', p. 13.

account written by Soviet historian M.A. Persits, the *muhajirin* had quite a different view of the Revolution. Culled from questionnaires and intelligence reports, Russia, far from being a place of exile and suffering, was instead 'a good place to be in'. Another *muhajir* reportedly claimed that 'if Communist principles are honestly carried, the whole world will be free'. Similarly, Abdul Majid, later a leading member of the communist and revolutionary movement in the Punjab, wrote in his questionnaire that he 'heartily agreed with the Communist programme'.[94] The same Abdul Majid would later tell his British interrogators that they were all 'miserable in Russia'.[95] To that, one can of course add the celebratory accounts penned by Usmani, Dada, Naina Singh, and others.

And yet, even in Soviet accounts, the *muhajirin* were not revolutionary subjects in their own rights. This is where Soviet accounts converged with British perceptions about Indian revolutionaries. The preface to Persits' book, for instance, noted how the *muhajirin*, along with other Indian revolutionaries of that period, 'held primitive Socialistic views basically rooted in egalitarian and other pre-Marxian notions of the essence of Socialism'. Many believed that the only way to end British rule was by force of arms, which meant soliciting military aid from the Soviet Union. 'It was not easy', he added, 'to teach those national revolutionaries a sense of reality, so it is not surprising that they should not have accepted much of the ideology and tactics of Marxism.' With the passage of time, however, Indian revolutionaries 'came nearer to Marxism'. They turned to the 'scientific theory of socialism and to the evidence of its actual application by Russian communists under Lenin's guidance to see how they had to go about winning their own national independence and resolving their urgent social problems'.[96] Written in 1973, this account may have echoed Soviet and Marxist orthodoxy of its time. But these tropes and assumptions are also to be found in Soviet accounts at the time, especially as the Soviet Union moved towards increasing ideological inflexibility under Joseph Stalin. Indians, for all their revolutionary zeal, were not 'proper' revolutionaries. Most were seemingly more interested in national liberation and a 'crude' version of socialism than they were in the finer details of Marxism–Leninism. They could only be taught and closely supervised under Soviet tutelage before they could fully claim their place as revolutionary subjects.

[94] M.A. Persits, *Revolutionaries of India in Soviet Russia: Mainsprings of the Communist Movement in the East*, trans. Lev Bobrov (Progress Publishers, 1983, originally published 1973), pp. 112–113.
[95] 'Indian Revolutionaries Intercepted', 'Statement of Abdul Majid'.
[96] Persits, *Revolutionaries of India in Soviet Russia*, pp. 6–10.

If that was a problem, the accounts of Indian revolutionaries and communists hardly ever mentioned it. There is little by way of any criticism of the Soviet Union and the Comintern. If anything, the only criticism comes from colonial interrogation reports, such as the one mentioned above. Dada came closest to criticising the Comintern when he wrote, almost in passing, about his bitter arguments with Comintern officials for their neglect of India.[97] There were, of course, other disagreements between Indian revolutionaries, and Comintern and Soviet officials. The most renowned of them were the exchanges between M.N. Roy and Lenin. Roy, later, developed differences with the Soviet leadership, including Stalin himself, and was expelled from the Comintern in 1929. But Roy's later critique of communism and the Soviet Union aside, there was little by way of criticism from Indian communists. Nor was anything said against Stalinism, which ushered in an era of suffocating ideological rigidity and unprecedented levels of internal persecution. It was not simply that Indian communists could not afford to break away from Stalin and thereby the Comintern and the international communist movement. They also had to defend the Soviet Union and communism itself from critiques and attacks by opponents within India, especially from the end of the 1920s onwards. It was also difficult to disentangle legitimate critiques of the Soviet Union from the daily propaganda against the Revolution. If maintaining that position became more difficult during the Stalinist purges of the 1930s, it went virtually uncommented on in communist publications and pronouncements. The Comintern suffered greatly during the purges, and in a fact that went virtually unacknowledged, Indians too fell victim to Stalin's purges. Even then, far too many comrades continued to deny the crimes and excesses of Stalinism, even after it had been condemned in the Soviet Union under Nikita Khrushchev. Of the victims – perhaps the most famous of them all – was Virendranath Chattopadhyaya. He was executed in 1937 in the Great Terror. It is difficult to get a measure of how many Indians were executed in the purges. Some reports put the number at more than forty.[98] These reportedly included Abani Mukherjee and Jawala Singh Dhoot, brother of Naina Singh Dhoot, though Naina Singh himself does not mention his brother's end in his memoirs.[99]

[97] Gardezi, *Chains to Lose*, vol. II, p. 717.

[98] *The Indian Express*, 'Stalin's Indian Victims', 28 September 2003, http://archive.indianexpress.com/oldStory/32362/.

[99] Narrated to Amarjit Chandan by Sardara Singh, a revolutionary who spent much of his long life in Moscow. Interview dated 12 September 1989, British Library Sound Archive C1195/28. In that interview and in the subsequent correspondence between the two (in letters from Moscow, dated June 1990), Sardara Singh reported that Jawala

If Indian communists were uneasy at the ongoing convulsions and purges in the Soviet Union, they did a remarkably good job of concealing it. Stalin was venerated as a great and visionary leader. Glowing tributes to him were regularly published in communist publications, while erstwhile heroes, and later traitors, like Grigory Zinoviev, Lev Kamenev, and Leon Trotsky, were roundly condemned and vilified. In one hagiography after another, Stalin was presented as a defender, liberator, saviour, and the very personification of the 'immortal doctrine' of Marx, Engels, and Lenin.[100] It goes without saying that these fawning tributes were issued keeping two audiences in mind. The first was in India itself. The second, and arguably more important, audience was based in Moscow. After all, pamphlets, publications, newspapers, internal communiqués, party resolutions, letters, and so on were regularly sent from India to the Soviet Union for soliciting advice and providing evidence of the ongoing revolutionary and national liberation struggle against the British Empire.

Other communist parties, too, found themselves in a similar situation. Internationalism meant an unwavering, uncritical, and unconditional support of the Soviet Union. The tone for this line was set soon after the death of Lenin in 1924. In the ensuing power struggle and the rise of Stalin, there was a rapid shift towards centralization and the 'Bolshevization' of the Comintern. In practice, as David Priestland argues, this meant that Communist parties 'were increasing transformed into tools of Soviet foreign policy'. Stalin himself set the line by arguing that

> an internationalist is one who is ready to defend the USSR without reservation, without wavering, unconditionally; for the USSR is the base of the world revolutionary movement, and this revolutionary movement cannot be defended and promoted without defending the USSR.[101]

Singh Dhoot married 'a Russian typist' girl and stayed behind in Moscow. In that, he was hardly alone, for there were others too who married Russian women and stayed on in Moscow. Jawala Singh Dhoot, however, was caught up in the Stalinist purges that claimed the lives of erstwhile comrades. He was reportedly 'high tempered' and indiscrete in his political pronouncements. He would, as Bhagat Singh Bilga would later confirm to Chandan, argue a lot ('*O behas barhi karda si*'). Dhoot was vocal in his criticism of the political situation in the Soviet Union and spoke of his disaffection in a general body meeting of university students. For that crime, he was allegedly arrested and shot by the NKVD (The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs). Others, however, died of more innocuous reasons. One Banta Singh, for instance, died of tuberculosis (as did Dalip Singh Gill) while another revolutionary, Joga Singh, apparently succumbed to an infection he contracted while shaving his beard. (Both incidents narrated to Chandan by Sardara Singh.)

[100] *National Front* II, 12, 30 April 1939.

[101] Quoted in David Priestland, *The Red Flag: A History of Communism* (Grove Press, 2009). Also see the speech by Stalin where he develops this argument. See J. Stalin, 'Concerning Questions of Leninism', 25 January 1926, www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1926/01/25.htm.

His declaration was a precursor to the so-called Third Period in 1928 when the Comintern turned inward and adopted an ultra-left and sectarian policy that sharpened divisions between communists and other leftists, trade unionists, and radical nationalists. This was a far cry from the 'united front' policy adopted by the Comintern in its initial years when communists were tasked with working with social democrats and national liberation struggles when it came to the colonized world.[102] From there to the ultra-left shift of the 'Third Period' to the 'Popular Front' line in 1935, to yet another shift in 1939, and then in 1941, the Comintern changed its policies keeping in view a rapidly shifting world situation. And while, its 'primary function was to identify and enact the proper strategies and tactics to hasten international socialist revolution',[103] in practice its main priority was to defend the Soviet Union. The 'General Staff of the World Revolution', as M.N. Roy called it,[104] often reflected the domestic and foreign policy needs of the USSR.[105]

[102] This was also the question on which M.N. Roy and V.I. Lenin had their famous disagreement. That debate has acquired an iconic status, at least in the scholarship and commentary on the Indian communist movement, perhaps because the novelty of a young 'Indian upstart [who] dared question the wisdom of Lenin and cross verbal swords with the master of polemics' (in Roy's words, *Memoirs,* p. 380) never quite wore off. Lenin had argued in favour of a united front between national liberation movements and communists, arguing in the case of India that nationalism, and specifically, Gandhi, was a revolutionary force. In contrast, Roy warned against relying on the bourgeois and opportunist leadership of the Indian nationalist movement, and by extension, other colonial contexts in the East. In his view, this leadership would sooner throw in their lot with imperialist powers than allow the victory of world communism. For more detail, see Lenin, 'Draft Theses on National and Colonial Questions for the Second Congress of the Communist International', 5 June 1920, www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/jun/05.htm. For Roy's argument, see his 'Theses on the Eastern Question', Third Congress of the Communist International, 12 July 1921, www.marxists.org/archive/roy/1921/roy03.htm. Roy also writes about his debate with Lenin at length in his *Memoirs*, pp. 375–382. For a scholarly treatment of the issue, see Kris Manjapra, *M.N. Roy: Marxism and Colonial Cosmopolitanism*; John P. Haithcox, 'The Roy–Lenin Debate on Colonial Policy: A New Interpretation', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 23, 1(1963), 93–101; and part 1 of Sanjay Seth, *Marxist Theory and Nationalist Politics: The Case of Colonial India* (Sage, 1995), which addresses the Comintern and Soviet view vis à vis the Indian nationalist movement. For a book-length treatment of M.N. Roy's fraught relations with the Comintern, see John P. Haithcox, *Communism and Nationalism in India: M.N. Roy and Comintern Policy, 1920–1939* (Princeton University Press, 1971). Finally, see Sobhanlal Datta Gupta, *Comintern and the Destiny of Communism in India: 1919–1943: Dialectics of Real and a Possible History* (Seribaan, 2006) for a useful overview of the Comintern's approach towards India.

[103] William Chase, *Enemies within the Gates: The Comintern and the Stalinist Repression, 1934–1939* (Yale University Press, 2001), p. 12.

[104] M.N. Roy, *Memoirs*, p. 378.

[105] Chase, *Enemies within the Gates*, pp. 15–16. Indeed, the defence of 'every soviet republic' was part of the famed twenty-one conditions under which communist parties were to be admitted to the Comintern. See Minutes of the Second Congress

But that did not necessarily mean that communist parties the world over were firmly tied to Moscow's apron – and, frequently, purse – strings. To be sure, there was some substance in British allegations of 'Moscow Gold'. The generous supply of what M.N. Roy called 'Bolshevik Gold' financed communist parties around the world. Without it, Roy claimed, international communism could not have become a become a power as quickly as it did. But this came at a price, for communist parties effectively grew as 'Russian satellites'. Far too frequently, 'second or third rate' men in the Comintern wielded their 'control of purse-strings to demand abject subordination of the Communist Parties in other countries to their whims and very mediocre political leadership'.[106] That, at any rate, was Roy's view. Other Indian communists would have profoundly disagreed with his assessment and would have put it down to his eventual opposition to Soviet communism.

Regardless of funds, or their lack thereof, the Indian communist movement was not merely tied to Moscow in its allegiances. It was also tied to the Communist Party of Great Britain. In an arguably another form of imperialism, the Comintern had decreed that communist parties in imperialist countries were to direct, mentor, and tutor communist parties in their respective colonies. The former in turn was to receive its directives from the 'Eastern Section' of the Comintern's Executive Committee, the ECCI.[107] That said, these arrangements looked far more rigid and dictatorial than they were in practice. For the most part, the CPGB did not wield restrictive control over communist parties in the British Empire.[108] The same was true for Moscow's intervention, even when Indian communists established direct links with the Comintern. The actual degree and effect of Moscow's influence, as David Priestland notes, was a complex question. As much as it tried, the Comintern could not monitor, let alone control the activities of all communist parties at all levels. For that reason, communist subcultures emerged around the world that had little, if anything, to do with Moscow.[109] The same, as the following chapters will show, was true for the Indian context. And

of the Communist International, Seventh Session, 30 July 1920, www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/2nd-congress/ch07.htm. For a comprehensive discussion on the ideas, formation, and evolution of the communist party as an institution, see A. James McAdams, *Vanguard of the Revolution: The Global Idea of the Communist Party* (Princeton University Press, 2017).

[106] M.N. Roy, *Memoirs*, p. 519. [107] Ibid., p. 525.

[108] See for example Marika Sherwood, 'The Comintern, the CPGB, Colonies and Black Britons, 1920–1938', *Science & Society* 60, 2 (1996), 137–163.

[109] Priestland, *The Red Flag: A History of Communism.* Also see Fredrik Petersson, 'The "Colonial Conference" and Dilemma of the Comintern's Colonial Work, 1928–29', in Vijay Prashad (ed.), *Communist Histories,* vol. 1 (LeftWord Books, 2016). Petersson

while the Indian communist movement was charged and persecuted for its ties with, and uncritical celebration and defence of, the Soviet Union, this was not merely an outcome of a top-down relationship between Moscow and India. As the inaugurator of a new history, and the only communist power, the Soviet Union commanded a prestige that equalled, if not surpassed, any support it may have given to communist movements. What is more, the defeat of the Soviet Union would also likely have spelt a calamitous defeat for communist movements around the world. For that reason, too, the defence of the Soviet Union was the responsibility of communists around the world.

Break with the Old World

For its part, the Indian communist movement paid a heavy political price for its ostensible obsequiousness towards the Soviet Union. Over the course of the interwar era, communists were increasingly viewed by their political opponents as dogmatic, rigid, doctrinaire, and inextricably bound to their Soviet and Comintern interlocutors. This was the most difficult charge for the communists to shrug off. And it was one that continued to plague the communist movement in India and Pakistan as well. All this was a far cry from the early 1920s, when the Bolshevik Revolution was hailed with near-universal acclaim. Shaukat Usmani, for instance, recounts a meeting with Madan Mohan Malviya, a key figure in Hindu communitarian politics. In the course of their conversation, Malviya was reportedly 'very enthusiastic about the Soviet Union, and said that he would do anything for the people suffering for the sake of their ideology'. He also 'exclaimed in glee, "I would like to go to receive the Bolshevik Army at Peshawar if they came to liberate us."'[110] Whether Malviya would have agreed with Usmani's account of their conversation is, of course, another matter altogether, but his reported view would not have been out of place for the all-too-brief period in which the Soviet Union was almost universally viewed as the vanguard of a new, emancipatory, age.

Emancipation, of course, meant different things to different people. For many, it merely meant liberation from British rule. For Indian communists, however, it meant something far more reaching, far more substantive, far more utopian. Emancipation signified a complete 'break with the Old World'. It was no coincidence that Dada chose this as a title

provides an excellent and nuanced overview of the Comintern's fraught, and often, non-existent, 'colonial work' in the 1920s.

[110] Shaukat Usmani, *Historic Trips of a Revolutionary* (Sterling Publishers, 1977), p. 90.

for his chapter on his sojourn in the Soviet Union. For Dada, Naina Singh, Shaukat Usmani, Santokh Singh, Rattan Singh, and countless others, the Soviet experiment inaugurated a new history; a history that transformed them as much as it had transformed the world. For Naina Singh, communism gave them a new way see the world. It gave them a language to articulate what had long been felt, but not expressed; it gave them a name for that which oppressed them; it enabled them to recognize their oppression for what it truly was.[111] For the 'first time in my life', Dada recounted, 'I had begun to understand things that had been unknown to me'.[112] If he preferred the Soviet system, it was because it had made him 'socially aware'.[113] And it was only through that recognition that they too could hope to change the world. But more than that, the utopian project of Communist Internationalism also enabled them to reinvent themselves. Former lascars, factory workers, vagabonds, peasants, and migrant labourers became the vanguard of a revolution in the making. From being acted on by it, they became makers of History. In which other world could such a transformation have been possible?

Read charitably, this explained in part their unquestioned devotion to the Soviet Union, despite clear indications that the dream was beginning to turn sour for many, including their erstwhile comrades. They had invested far too much of themselves in this project to see it otherwise. Whether their paths crossed through Moscow or not, their participation in this grandest of all emancipatory projects had given Indian revolutionaries a sense of purpose and destiny. Their world had changed. It was now time to change India.

[111] Dhoot, *Political Memoirs*, p. 109.
[112] Gardezi, *Chains to Lose*, vol. II, p. 545.
[113] Ibid., p. 619.

4 This Time is Ours

> A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of Utopias.[1]
>
> Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man under Socialism*

Late in 1922, Santokh Singh and Rattan Singh left the United States for the Soviet Union. They were the first Ghadarites to make the trip to Moscow and establish contacts with the Comintern. There, they attended the Fourth Congress of the Communist International and addressed the Second Congress of the Red Labour International. They also reportedly met Grigory Zinoviev, member of the Politburo and head of the Comintern.[2] Both men stayed in Moscow for a few months, where they had 'ample opportunity', as the Home Department put it, 'for studying Soviet methods of village propaganda with a view to fomenting mass revolution on his return to India'.[3]

Born in Singapore in 1893, Santokh Singh was the son of a gunner in the British Indian Army. He returned to the Punjab upon his father's retirement when he was 12 years old. After obtaining his secondary school education, he left for England, and later for the United States. Little is known about his early career in official sources, nor was there any 'real necessity' to know, as an official airily put it. As long as there was no connection with his future revolutionary activities, there was little point in investigating his formative years.[4] And so, much like other apparitions

[1] Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man under Socialism* (1891), www.marxists.org/reference/archive/wilde-oscar/soul-man/. Also quoted with an insightful commentary in Robert T. Tally, *Utopia in the Age of Globalization: Space, Representation, and the World System* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 1.

[2] NAI/F262/II-1923/Home Dept, 'Santokh Singh', 'Note on Santokh Singh', pp. 12–13.

[3] IOR/L/P&J/12/300 'Kirti-Kisan Party and Ghadr newspaper Kirti', 'Note on the Kirti-Kisan Sabha', File P&J(S) 1013 (1932), p. 1.

[4] NAI/F262/II-1923/Home Dept, 'Santokh Singh', 'Synopsis of Case against Santokh Singh s/o Jawala Singh, village Dhader, PS Beas, District Amritsar', p. 15.

in colonial archives, what we have is a fragment of Santokh Singh's life. For much the same reasons, the brief biographical accounts of Santokh Singh penned by his comrades are not any different.[5]

What there seems to be consensus on is that Santokh Singh was closely involved in Ghadar's activities from its very inception. Elected as the party's secretary, Santokh Singh was at the forefront of organizing the Ghadar rebellion of 1914/15. He travelled to South East Asia in 1914, reportedly first to Shanghai and later to Siam, where he coordinated the party's activities and liaised with German agents to acquire money and ammunition for the rebellion. Much like other schemes, this plan failed to materialize. In 1916, Santokh Singh surfaced in Japan, from where he returned to the United States.[6] Soon after his arrival he was arrested, tried, and convicted in the San Francisco Case on the charge of conspiring with the German government. Released in 1919, Santokh Singh had come a long way in his political thinking. While in prison, he was introduced by communist inmates to Marxism and the significance of the Bolshevik Revolution.[7] After his release, he was reportedly advising people to learn Marxist theory and the Russian language. He was also advocating the need for India to have a political and social revolution.[8] A few years afterwards, he left for the Soviet Union with Rattan Singh.

After their sojourn in the Soviet Union, both men set off for India through Central Asia in the summer of 1923. While 'surreptitiously' entering India through the northwest, Santokh Singh was arrested, while Rattan Singh managed to flee. Transferred to the Punjab, Santokh Singh was incarcerated, and later released on furnishing a security for 'good behaviour' for a period of one year. After seeing out his term, he announced the publication of the monthly *Kirti* (Worker), the inaugural issue of which eventually came out in February 1926.[9] Santokh Singh did not live long to see his paper or his politics thrive. He died in May 1927, a victim of tuberculosis, a few months short of the founding of the *Kirti Kisan Sabha* (Workers and Peasants Party) for which he helped lay the groundwork.

The Kirti Kisan Sabha, or the Kirti group, as it was called, would eventually become the most prominent leftist network in British Punjab. For the Raj, the movement was 'part of conspiracy against the State'

[5] See for example the account of Santokh Singh in Sohan Singh Josh, *My Meetings with Bhagat Singh and Other Early Revolutionaries* (Communist Party of India, 1976).
[6] NAI/F262/II-1923/Home Dept, 'Synopsis of Case', p. 15.
[7] Josh, *My Meetings with Bhagat Singh*, p. 69.
[8] NAI/F262/II-1923/Home Dept, 'Santokh Singh', 'Note on Santokh Singh', pp. 10–11.
[9] IOR/L/P&J/12/300, 'Note on the Kirti-Kisan Sabha', p. 1.

conducted by a 'number of disaffected Sikhs in India and in certain foreign countries'.[10] The party's founding objectives pledged:

(1) To achieve complete independence from British imperialism by employing every possible method in order to liberate the workers and peasants from political, economic, and social serfdom and to establish their united democratic power.
(2) To organize the workers and peasants (for achieving this objective).[11]

The Kirti Sabha was, self-professedly, the first organized 'communist' group founded in the Punjab. It was also among several workers and peasants' parties established in India around this time.[12] And much like its sister organizations, it also had a relatively short life. Founded in 1927, it was formally banned by the Punjab provincial government in 1934. In that, the Sabha was like other communist and revolutionary organizations that rarely had a long and continuous organizational life. Even so, the Kirti network continued working through other platforms and groups. More than its formal existence, though, the Kirti movement provides an illuminating example of how Communist Internationalism found fertile ground in specific localities and regions. Through its links with Ghadar and the Comintern, the Kirti Party was tied to diasporic revolutionary networks and the international communist movement. And alongside the Communist Party of India, the Kirti network was the only communist group to have direct ties with the Comintern. At the same time, the party was thoroughly embedded in the Punjabi sociocultural and political landscape. The Kirti Sabha, then, provides a salutary reminder of how intimately local politics was tied to the shifting tides of international communism, and global politics in general. It also provides an illuminating insight into what communism meant to the ordinary men and women who were a part of the movement. Tracing this history from the bottom up sets it against histories of Indian communism, which take an All India, party-centric, and elite-dominated perspective.[13] And far removed from theoretical treatises and theses, this

[10] PPSAI 1928, Lahore, 5 May, No. 18, Supplement 1, p. 199.
[11] IOR/V/27/262/5, 'India and Communism (Revised up to 1935)', p. 271. Also see Sohan Singh Josh, *My Tryst with Secularism: An Autobiography* (South Asia Books, 1991), p. 118. That said, Josh also quotes this from court papers.
[12] These different branches first convened under the auspices of the All India Workers and Peasants Conference in 1928. See IOR/L/P&J/12/64 'Workers and Peasants Party', pp. 2–11. The AIWP was intended as a front for the communist party, which was legally proscribed.
[13] Other notable studies to have viewed communism within a regional and local frame include Dilip Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India: Malabar, 1900–1948* (Cambridge University Press, 1994). For the Punjab specifically, see

perspective also affords us a view of how 'communism' was negotiated through the everyday. More importantly, though, the case of the Kirti Sabha also serves as reminder of how the expectation of a transforming world was not simply restricted to Moscow or the Soviet Union. Instead, it was shared by localities and regions across India. Viewed this way, the thread of internationalism bound India to the Soviet Union and other centres of revolutionary political activism.

Revolution Is in the Air

The Kirti Kisan Party was founded at a time of uncertainty, upheaval, and discontent. Those years are often viewed as time in the wilderness for mainstream nationalist politics. The abrupt end of the non-cooperation movement in 1922 after the Chauri Chaura incident had left Indian nationalists and political radicals in a state of disarray. And yet this was also a time of optimism when new political experiments were being conducted in arenas outside the hallowed chambers of elite politics. The Akali movement, one of the most serious challenges the Raj faced – and on which more will be said in the following chapter – had recently concluded. The Akali movement itself had followed on the heels of the Khilafat and non-cooperation movements.[14] Together with the Ghadar network, these movements provided a fertile ground for political radicalism to thrive. They also they served as political training grounds for future revolutionaries.

The party was not the first communist or revolutionary group to emerge in the Punjab. Leaving aside the question of how either was to be defined, the first instance, according to an intelligence handbook, *Communism in India*, was a short-lived experiment in Lahore by one Ghulam Hussain, a veteran of the Hijrat Movement who had worked with M.N. Roy. In 1922 Hussain started an Urdu paper called the *Inquilab* (Revolution). That was before his enterprise sank under

Bhagwan Josh, *Communist Movement in Punjab, 1926–47* (Anupama Publications, 1979); Gurharpal Singh, *Communism in Punjab: A Study of the Movement up to 1967* (South Asia Books, 1994); and Shalini Sharma, *Radical Politics in Colonial Punjab: Governance and Sedition* (Routledge, 2009). These and other books are valuable for the insights they provide into regional expressions of communism, but in doing so, they neglect the deep links that regional communism had with global politics, and, most notably, international communism.

[14] The serious threat both movements posed, at least to colonial officialdom, has often been underestimated. Both movements witnessed an unprecedented surge in violent incidents and open defiance of state authority. These incidents would set a template for future activism. See for instance the *Memorandum on the Disturbances in the Punjab April 1919* (Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1997; originally published by Government Printing Punjab, 1920).

allegations of corruption and embezzlement.[15] Elsewhere, Shaukat Usmani had set up a 'communist group' in Benares, while Muzaffar Ahmad and Singaravelu Chettiar put out the *Ganavani* in Bengal and the *Labour Kisan Gazette* in Madras, respectively. Other notable papers included M.N. Roy's *Vanguard of Indian Independence* and *Masses of India*, both published in Europe and smuggled into India and distributed clandestinely.[16] In addition, literature of a 'distinctly communistic flavour' was in regular circulation. It is difficult to know what kind of literature qualified as 'distinctly communistic', but there is much to suggest that at this juncture it constituted anything remotely deemed to be 'seditious'. The same applied to charges of 'Bolshevism'. The Akali leadership, as Sohan Singh Josh recounts, were slandered as 'Bolsheviks' long before 'communism' became a byword for sedition.[17] Still, there were texts in circulation like *Rus Men Yugantar* (New Era in Russia) and *Talstoi ki Talim* (Teachings of Tolstoy) that seemed to fit their subversive billing.[18]

This literary output was accompanied by an appreciable upsurge in 'revolutionary activities'. As elsewhere in North India, self-styled revolutionary groups were in operation in urban centres in Punjab by the mid-1920s. Organized primarily by young men in response to the perceived failure of the non-cooperation movement and the illusory promises of mainstream nationalism, these were small groups involved in militant activism. The most significant, the Naujawan Bharat Sabha (NJBS) (Indian Young Men's Association), was founded in 1926. The Sabha was an affiliate body of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association, also known as the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army.[19] Both became renowned for their most illustrious member, Bhagat Singh, arguably the most iconic Indian revolutionary of the twentieth century. While it is not my intention to recount his biography here, Bhagat Singh's life epitomized the political journeys of many disaffected youths who took to revolutionary and militant activism.[20] Involved in a (mistaken) high-profile

[15] IOR/V/27/262/3, 'Communism in India 1924–1927', p. 164.
[16] Jyoti Basu (ed.), *Documents of the Communist Movement in India, Vol. 1 (1917–1928)* (National Book Agency, 1997), p. xxxiii.
[17] Josh, *My Tryst with Secularism*, p. 102.
[18] IOR/V/27/262/3, 'Communism in India 1924–1927', p. 157.
[19] For excellent accounts on the Sabha and the HSRA, see Shalini Sharma, 'Developing a Communist Identity: The Case of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha', *Journal of Punjab Studies* 14, 2 (2007), 167–187 and Kama Maclean, *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India*.
[20] For works on Bhagat Singh's life and politics, see Irfan Habib, *To Make the Deaf Hear: Ideology and Programme of Bhagat Singh and His Comrades* (Three Essays Collective, 2007). and Maclean, *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India*. His story has also been exhaustively covered in popular accounts and, in particular, a number of Bollywood

assassination of John Saunders, Assistant Superintendent of Police in Lahore, in 1928, Bhagat Singh later courted arrest against the passing of the draconian Public Safety and Trade Disputes Bill by throwing a bomb inside the Central Legislative Assembly. His trial became the stuff of popular legend, as did his hanging – and those of his comrades Raj Guru and Sukhdev – in Lahore in March 1931.

Bhagat Singh's death earned him the title of *Shaheed-e-Azam* (Great Martyr). He was not the only *Shaheed* who went to the gallows for his or her revolutionary activities, nor was he the only *Shaheed-e-Azam*.[21] Bhagat Singh's hanging further galvanized a radical and militantly nationalist politics that was in a state of ferment from the mid-1920s onwards.[22] It also lent an added urgency to the ongoing civil disobedience movement. His actions, much like his death, came in an atmosphere in which the hoarse cries of *Inquilab Zindabad* (Long Live Revolution) rend the air at public rallies and demonstrations. With passions running high, a dizzying number of short-lived 'revolutionary'-cum-'terrorist' groups surfaced across North India with imaginative names like the 'Red Rose Republicans' or the 'Punjab *Intiqami* (Revenge) Party'.[23] Negligibly small in scale, these groups engaged in activities ranging from dacoity, sabotage, and placing of (frequently) ineffective bombs that often went off in their own houses to relatively innocuous acts like pouring acid down letterboxes.[24] Stretched to the limit, policing and intelligence departments repeatedly expressed their fears about a 'cult' that went by various names: the 'cult of the bomb', the 'cult of violence' or, predictably, the 'cult of revolution'.[25]

films and theatre performances. These are in addition to public memorials and museums, not to mention the fact that an impressive number of districts, townships, and neighbourhoods have been named in his honour. Indeed, the memory of Bhagat Singh and his appropriation today has been the subject of several studies. See Chris Moffat, *India's Revolutionary Inheritance: Politics and the Promise of Bhagat Singh* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), and 'Bhagat Singh's Corpse', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 39, 3 (2016), 644–661. Also see Ishwar D. Gaur, *Martyr as Bridegroom: A Folk Representation of Bhagat Singh* (Anthem Press, 2008). For Bhagat Singh's own writings, see D.N. Gupta (ed.), *Bhagat Singh, Select Speeches and Writings* (National Book Trust, 2007) and especially his most iconic essay, 'Why I Am an Atheist', www.marxists.org/archive/bhagat-singh/1930/10/05.htm.

[21] In popular memory that accolade also went to Sardar Udham Singh, a.k.a. Ram Mohammad Singh 'Azad', assassin of Sir Michael O' Dwyer – Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab at the time of the infamous Jallianwala Bagh massacre – in London in 1940.

[22] A point made, among others, by Kama Maclean in *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India* and 'Revolution and Revelation, or, When Is History Too Soon?', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 39, 3 (2016), 678–694. The latter work is also a brilliant meditation on historiography and the methodology of excavating revolutionary histories.

[23] PPSAI 1931, Lahore, 10 January, No. 2, p. 25 and 28 February, No. 9, pp. 139–140.

[24] PPSAI 1932, Simla-E, 28 May, No. 22, p. 291.

[25] PPSAI 1931, Lahore, 17 January, No. 3, p. 43 and 24 January, No. 4, p. 57.

Indeed, a good way to conclude this section would be to reproduce the words of a cyclostyled poster – presumably functioning as a public service announcement – issued by an obscure 'Youngmen Association' in 1931. More than anything else, this poster might come close to depicting the atmosphere of the time:

Youngmen Association

Prescription for Preparing Bomb

We by means of this poster, inform the Police who come to the Jallianwala Bagh that they should come prepared. We must attack them. We have rung the danger bell. The public should use the following prescription for the making of bombs:

1. Picric Acid
2. Nitric acid
3. Sulphuric acid
4. Carbolic acid
5. Almunium [*sic*] acid
6. Potacium [*sic*] chlorate
7. Kamila
8. Picrics [*sic*]
9. Blades of safety razor
10. Pieces of glass
11. Case (case is of tin).[26]

Provincializing the International

Stepping into this febrile atmosphere, and feeding off it, were activists who laid the foundation for the Kirti Kisan Party (KKP). An intelligence report filed in mid-1927 reported a meeting of sixty-five 'Sikh extremists' in Amritsar intent on forming 'a communist group in the Punjab'. The party would resemble labour parties in England and America and was to work independently of the Indian National Congress or any other political group. Meanwhile, an appropriately perfidious 'Karl Marxian' manifesto was drawn up.[27] The proceedings of a 'political conference' that followed this initial meeting were an added source of concern for the authorities. The opening conference, attended by hundreds, commenced with reading out a cable reportedly 'received from the labourers of Berlin and conveying the greetings of the League Against Imperialism (LAI)' to the conference with the express wish 'that workers and peasants parties will be organized and affiliated to the League' for the cause of 'complete freedom' through the joint efforts of 'oppressed people and classes'.

[26] PPSAI 1931, Lahore, 25 April, No. 17, pp. 265–266.
[27] PPSAI 1927, Lahore, 24 September, No. 37, p. 399.

The man behind the cable was, predictably, none other than Rattan Singh.[28] A slew of resolutions were then passed, the more noteworthy of which lent firm support for China's 'struggle for freedom' and the Russian Revolution, expressed sympathy with a British communist arrested in Bombay, condemned the imprisonment of three 'seditionists' (read: Ghadarites) by the British in Shanghai, and swore to withhold Indian labour in the event of an Anglo-Russo war. Accompanying these resolutions were passionate speeches decrying the evils of British Imperialism, untouchability, communalism, religious preachers, moneylenders, peasant debt, exploitative revenue systems, additional taxes and levies, unequal distribution of wealth, overpaid government employees and, for good measure, the government's unjustifiably expensive move to Simla every summer.[29]

These speeches and resolutions may seem remarkable for their time – especially for a rural audience – but they were fairly usual given the prevailing political and intellectual upheaval. They were also characteristic of Kirti politics. Kirti activists regularly blended local and overwhelmingly rural anxieties of the small peasant proprietor with the national liberation movement. But more importantly, both concerns were woven together within an internationalist framework and a politics of solidarity that allied itself with other revolutionary struggles around the world. That much had already been evident with Santokh Singh's statement announcing the launch of the *Kirti*. The paper, Santokh Singh claimed, would

> be the office of Indian workers living in America and Canada, and will be dedicated to the sacred memory of those heroes and martyrs who awakened sleeping India at a time when the value of sacrifice was far higher that it is now and whose ideal was regarded by our own people as well as by outsiders as the dream of Alnaschar. The journal will sympathize with all the workers throughout the world, the entire female sex, the subjugated weak and oppressed nations and subjugated India.[30]

His statement was matched by the *Kirti*'s cover illustration. Framed within an outline of wreaths is a scene depicting what looks to be a *shaheed* (martyr) or a body of worker lying on a pyre being garlanded by the extended arms of the *Kirti*. In the backdrop lies a smoke-belching factory and resplendent fields, the site of the martyr's hard, unremitting, unforgiving labour. That cover was shortly afterwards replaced by

[28] Josh, *My Tryst with Secularism*, p. 117.
[29] PPSAI 1927, Lahore, 8 October, No. 39, pp. 431–432.
[30] PPSAI 1928, Lahore, 5 May, No. 18, Supplement 1, p. 199. Also see Santokh Singh's statement on what the *Kirti* would represent, in Josh, *My Tryst with Secularism*, pp. 103–105.

another illustration, reportedly because it did not meet the approval of those studying in Moscow.[31] The new illustration depicted two men, one a factory worker holding a hammer, the other an agriculturist wielding a sickle, their feet bound together by chains, while they were shaking hands. Intriguingly, both are wearing an outfit that would have been unrecognizable in Punjabi fields and factories. In the background are factories and green fields, while a red flag with a hammer and sickle proudly flutters in the sky above. These illustrations, together with the Santokh Singh's statement, neatly encapsulated what the *Kirti* represented. Its lineage stretched back into the diaspora to the Ghadar movement, while its objective of a workers and peasants' republic was predicated on internationalist solidarity with the oppressed of various descriptions, including, remarkably, women. While that commitment was frequently difficult, if not impossible, to live up to in the political arena, it was nevertheless a recurring theme in *Kirti* publications.

Whatever Communist Internationalism might have meant to its adherents, its invocation alone was sufficient to set off alarm bells in the corridors of power. Of greatest concern to the authorities was the suspected involvement of the Comintern in the KKP's activities. Their link with a communist Ghadar was evident, not least because Kirti ranks were regularly strengthened by Moscow returned Ghadarite graduates. All this while, their coffers were supplemented by funds raised in the Punjabi diaspora. What was unclear to the authorities, however, was the extent to which the Comintern controlled the Kirtis and other leftist groups in the subcontinent. For their part, the Kirtis gave little comfort to the ever-present police spies with all their too public and thunderous declarations of unconditional support for the Soviet Union. Slogans like 'Long live the Russian Kirti Raj' rang out in leftist rallies while events such as 'Friends of Russia Week' were regularly organized in towns and villages. The Soviet Union was frequently held up as a model society and as a utopia worth emulating. The people of Russia were lauded on overthrowing the Tsar and building a society where workers and peasants prospered without any distinction of caste and creed. And lest there be any suspicion that Russia might have its own imperial ambitions *vis à vis* India, it was declared that Indians would be happy to ally themselves with the Russians. All Russia wanted, after all, was to destroy imperialism and replace it with the rule of workers and peasants.[32]

[31] Josh, *My Tryst with Secularism*, p. 110.

[32] PPSAI 1933, Lahore, 16 September, No. 36, p. 440; PPSAI 1928, Simla-E, 11 August, No. 31, p. 337; PPSAI 1928, Lahore, 16 February, No. 7, p. 74; PPSAI 1929, Lahore, 16 March, No. 11, pp. 130–131.

4.1 Cover depicting the body of a worker being garlanded by the extended arms of the *Kirti*.
Source: Desh Bhagat Yadgar Hall

4.2 *Kirti* cover depicting an agriculturist and a factory worker.
Source: Desh Bhagat Yadgar Hall

That said, lauding the epoch-defining Bolshevik Revolution was hardly the sole preserve of the Left, particularly in the 1920s. Long before the Soviet Union became associated with Stalinism, political opinion of virtually all shades, from the younger guard of the Congress to communitarian organizations like the Central Sikh League, repeatedly glorified the Bolshevik Revolution, albeit with interpretations tailored to suit the party line. The same was true for struggles elsewhere, especially those in Ireland and China, and not least since both were locked in a struggle against British Imperialism. According to one memoir, 'India reverberated' with the slogan 'not a single soldier, not a single rupee for war against China'.[33] While that may be stretching the point, the underlying sentiment remained true. In the Punjab, expressions of support were accompanied by a sense of embarrassment and lament that their fellow Punjabis were employed in the service of Empire and actively involved in crushing freedom struggles in China and elsewhere. This was coupled by a palpable fear of an inevitable clash between Russia and the British Empire in which Indian troops would surely be used to fight for the Empire. For Punjabi radicals, then, Indians 'could commit no greater sin than to side with the British in the event of war, for by doing so they would … only strengthen their own chains of slavery'.[34] Opposition to war and the recruitment of Indian troops was therefore a constant theme at leftist gatherings.

Much like its Ghadarite forebears, this line demonstrated a recognition of India's role within the larger imperial framework. It also exemplified a moment where there was seemingly little to separate nationalism and internationalism. Both drew from each other. If anything, for progressives and leftists, the national came via the international. This was particularly true insofar as the 1920s and early 1930s were concerned, a moment best exemplified by Jawaharlal Nehru's stirring call for the 'spirit of internationalism to replace the spirit of nationalism'.[35] Nor could it have been otherwise. As far as the Left was concerned, modern imperialism and capitalism had inextricably bound the world together. That meant that the question of liberation could not be restricted to national contexts alone. For much the same reason, a worker's movement in one country had to foster and maintain its links with its counterparts in other countries. Both were necessary to resist the global spread of Capital and Empire. Both were also necessary given an increasingly flattened world, a world in which modern communications had

[33] Josh, *My Tryst with Secularism*, p. 123.
[34] PPSAI 1928, Simla-E, 11 August, No. 31, p. 338.
[35] PPSAI 1928, Lahore, 21 April, No. 16, p. 171.

'destroyed' time and space.[36] For many, then, there was no way around the fact that the liberation of one was tied to the liberation of the other.

Defeating Empire, though, was not only necessary for economic and political emancipation: it was also necessary for regaining what was imagined as lost self-respect and dignity. This emotion too was crucial in the development of radical political thought in South Asia. Time and again, the KKP and its sister organizations expressed their anguish over how Indians were denigrated not just in India, but around the world owing to their colonized status. Losing respect in India was one matter, but losing one's honour, respect, and dignity in the world beyond was unimaginably painful. That, after all, had worked as a potent rallying cry for Ghadar too. And it continued to operate as a mobilizing cry for politics long afterwards. Consider, for instance, this excerpt from a police report on an NJBS meeting:

> A public meeting was held … under the auspices of the *Nau Jawan Bharat Sabha* to protest against the exhibition of a party of Indian jugglers by Karl Hagenbeck, the famous showman of wild beasts … L. Prithi Raj delivered a speech in which he said that they could not complain of the exhibition of Indians in a zoological garden in Berlin when they were treated like beasts in their own country, for they had been made to crawl like serpents at Amritsar and had been shot like wild animals in the Jallianwala Bagh.[37]

Was this effective? If regular pronouncements in leftist publications, reported speeches, and testimonies of revolutionaries are any guide, the answer would be in the affirmative. Such narrations were important for reminding disaffected young men (and they were mostly aimed at young men) what had been lost and what had to be regained. Dignity, self-respect, and personal honour could be powerful drivers for radical political action. And it was through regaining that that individuals and peoples could claim their rightful place in the international comity of nations.

Critiquing Nationalism

For all their convergences, the Kirtis, and the Left in general, had significant differences with the Congress high command and their vision for national liberation. The disagreements between the two over the

[36] Jyoti Basu (ed.), *Documents of the Communist Movement*, 'Presidential Address of S.S. Josh', p. 352.

[37] PPSAI 1926, Simla-E, 25 September, No. 38, p. 459. Though Hagenbeck had long been dead by this time, his reputation as one of the foremost exponents of human zoos and racist ethnography outlasted him. For more on Hagenbeck's enterprise and its all-too-evident intersections with European imperialism and ethnography, see Eric Ames, *Carl Hagenbeck's Empire of Entertainments* (University of Washington Press, 2009).

1920s and 1930s, and even afterwards, revolved around the meaning of freedom. What did freedom or *Swaraj* mean anyway? One view articulated by Sohan Singh Josh at the inaugural All India Workers and Peasants conference held that the Congress from its very inception had 'been fighting for the class interest of the bourgeoisie'. Nor had it ever represented the 'demands of the masses'. Every Congress-led agitation and movement had been an exercise in futility. Under the guise of national unity and national interest, the Congress under Mohandas K. Gandhi had time and again proved that it stood with 'landlords and capitalists'.[38] For those listening, this message was repeatedly driven home, even in times of ostensibly radical, direct, action by the Congress, as the following intelligence report on a KKP poster issued during the civil disobedience movement shows:

> An Urdu poster which appeared in Amritsar contains a bitter condemnation of the Congress for desertion of the cause of the peasants and workers and for consolidating the position of the Indian capitalists. It describes how the foreign cloth boycott was cunningly devised for this very purpose, with the result that volunteers have been sent to jail, petty shopkeepers had suffered great losses, while the only people who benefitted were the proprietors of the Indian mills. The assertion is made that the boycott was responsible for the general drop in trade which led to the fall in the price of corn, and here again the peasants have lost by the Congress movement.[39]

For communist revolutionaries, then, there was little by way of substantive emancipation in the Congress's *Swaraj*. With the interests of Indian landlords and capitalists firmly aligned with the British, *Swaraj* was merely a cosmetic measure designed to substitute 'Brown for White Bureaucracy'. As ever, the 'masses' would continue to be 'fleeced'. Nor – with their demands for 'self-government' – was the Congress ultimately interested in fighting Empire as a global phenomenon.[40] In any case, the Congress had been painfully slow in demanding *purna swaraj*, or complete political independence. As far as the Kirtis and other revolutionaries were concerned, they had been demanding complete independence long before the Congress adopted it as policy in December 1929 in Lahore.

Other contentious issues related to the question of *ahimsa*, or non-violence. For many in the Left, non-violence was a 'creed of the weak, of

[38] Jyoti Basu (ed.), *Documents of the Communist Movement*, 'Presidential Address of S.S. Josh', p. 343, and NAI/MCCP/218 'Statement of Sohan Singh Josh', p. 309.
[39] PPSAI 1931, Lahore, 17 January, No. 3, p. 46.
[40] Jyoti Basu (ed.), *Documents of the Communist Movement*, 'Presidential Address', p. 343, and NAI/MCCP/218 'Statement', pp. 345–348.

the reformists and defeatists' and a convenient tactic for those who were satisfied with the present order of things and did not want to 'dare and die for the creation of a better world'. Nor did the 'masses' have anything to gain from this 'creed', given that it had failed to solve their far more pressing problems of grinding poverty and hunger. More to the point, never in history had non-violence succeeded.[41] The *Kirti* in its earliest announcements had proclaimed that 'India will have to pay the same price for its freedom as other peoples have paid to win their freedom'. For Santokh Singh, that was the 'lesson of history'. And as Josh later remarked in his testimony during the Meerut Conspiracy Case (1929–34), the 'truth is that violence is essential for the real progress of mankind and is a mid-wife to social changes, new births and new orders'.[42] As ever, the invocation of history – and a universal history at that – was crucial here and could not be ignored, especially if a new age was to be inaugurated.

At the same time, this was not necessarily an unconditional endorsement of violence. For Josh and like-minded comrades, there was a distinction between 'terrorism' and 'revolutionary violence'. Individual acts of terrorism of the Bhagat Singh variety, such as lobbing bombs or grenades and carrying out targeted assassinations, had a mixed reception if only because they were ultimately ineffective. Nor, for Josh, had they succeeded anywhere. Murdering a few individuals was pointless because they could always be replaced by other 'tyrants'. A systemic change and a revolutionary transformation had its own requirements. What was required instead was revolutionary mass action, which could resort to violence if necessary. For those reasons, acts of individual terrorism were dismissed as the acts of impatient and misguided middle-class young men disgusted and disillusioned with the Congress's brand of reformist politics.[43] Which is why while such individuals were lauded – and how could Bhagat Singh not be? – their actions were rarely, if ever, endorsed by the communist leadership. But that was Josh's view. Others might well have been driven by different considerations. Moreover, there was also a thinly disguised contempt at work against such anarchist tactics. Revolutionaries were airily dismissed as hot-headed youths, driven more by passion and intellectual impoverishment than by a sophisticated understanding of what revolutionary change entailed. For those reasons, and more, 'communist' and 'socialist' leaders generally distanced themselves from 'revolutionary' groups. And for its part, as Chapter 6 makes clear, the state too made a distinction between

[41] NAI/MCCP/218, 'Statement', pp. 328–329.
[42] Ibid., p. 329.
[43] Ibid., pp. 333–444.

'terrorist' and 'revolutionary' politics on the one hand and 'socialist' and 'communist' on the other.

Still, for all their disagreements, the Left could not survive without the Congress either. The Left's relative insignificance and the Congress's stature as the only All India body leading the charge for national liberation made the question of how to deal with them unavoidable. It is difficult to generalize the nature of that relationship, given the enormous divergence of opinion in both the Left and the Congress and the fluctuating nature of their engagement over time. When the Left was not actively opposing the Congress, it was contesting elections on its platform and trying to influence the movement from within. Frequently, it was doing both. Moreover, for many within the Left, Jawaharlal Nehru and, to some extent, Subhas Chandra Bose were instinctive allies, at least for much of the 1920s and 1930s, even if both had to moderate their line at times. Nehru, for instance, was a regular fixture on leftist platforms and political conferences.[44] With their relatively small but rancorous and frequently disruptive presence, the Left acted as an important pressure group at the margins of the Congress. At the very least, then, the Left presented a constant alternative to the Congress's vision of an inclusionary nationalism that gave short shrift to existing cleavages within India and privileged Indian nationalism over anti-colonial and leftist internationalism. Nationalism, therefore, was a double-edged weapon, having the power to both arouse and betray legitimate aspirations. It had to be engaged with if the Left was ever to emerge as a viable political entity.

Organizing Revolution

That said, translating ideas into political action was a different matter altogether. Most groups had a short life. Constantly subject to police surveillance, frequently proscribed, and with their members regularly arrested or restricted to their villages, leftist groups struggled to survive and consolidate their all too paltry gains. Despite that, or perhaps because of it, matters relating to organization and party building were taken seriously by their members. The KKS, for example, styled itself as an 'All India' organization. There were attempts, with a varying degree of success, to establish Kirti Dals and Sabhas in Bengal, Orissa, Sindh, Delhi, the United Provinces and the North West Frontier Province. Usually, these organizations operated through Punjabis – overwhelmingly Sikhs – working and living in these provinces. Beyond India and

[44] Josh, *My Tryst with Secularism*, p. 125. This is also corroborated by police reports of the time.

the United States, Ghadar/Kirti cells were allegedly operating in Afghanistan, mainly Kabul, and Persia, where Kirti branches were said to exist in Tehran, Meshhad, Nasyriyah (Ahwaz), Zahidan, Tarbat-i-Haideri, Barfouroush, Gurmush Tepe (Astrabad), Bandar Pahlevi, and Barjand. In most cases, these 'cells' ostensibly consisted of lone agents charged with furrowing arms and money, usually in consort with the Soviets, into India. Even if true, these schemes were far more threatening on paper than on ground. For all practical purposes, then, the KKS was primarily a Punjab-based organization, though even in the Punjab, the party was concentrated in the central and eastern tracts of the province.[45]

In organizational matters, the Kirti Sabha operated much like other parties. There was a 'working committee' composed of leading party figures in the province. The provincial committee in turn elected office holders to the positions of General Secretary and Secretary, Treasurer/Financial Secretary, and Propaganda Secretary. Separate office holders were appointed to the *Kirti* and *Kisan* sections of the party.[46] Few office holders, however, could hold on to their positions. Frequent arrests, freshly returned Ghadarities, new members, defections to other organizations, and factional disputes over personality, money, and ideology, all contributed to a high turnaround rate. This organizational structure was more or less replicated lower down the party hierarchy as well. Party activists and sympathizers in their respective *tehsils* and districts organized local branches that later affiliated themselves with the provincial body. Here too elections were held to appoint office holders to the local and provincial branch.

In practice, local branches of the Sabha, whether affiliated with the central body or not, exhibited a significant degree of operational autonomy. In some *tehsils*, smaller bodies, such as the 'Kirti Kisan League', were founded in emulation of the provincial body. Some never affiliated themselves with the central body for reasons of maintaining their autonomy, and, more importantly, for avoiding state persecution that would inevitably be invited by their association with the central organization. Similarly, local activists followed a political line that was loosely defined and loosely controlled by the main body. Many, for instance, regularly worked with centrist and loyalist bodies such as the Zamindar League or Zamindar Sabha and with the local Congress and Akali Dal branch. The same was true the other way around. As ever, politics was very much a local affair. Cooperation and collaboration at the local level, even with

[45] IOR/L/P&J/12/300, 'Note on the Kirti-Kisan Sabha', pp. 7–10.
[46] PPSAI 1931, Lahore, 21 March, No. 12, p. 191.

rivals, was par for the course. Here, questions of ideology and political affiliation mattered less than personal relationships and issues of local importance. Much like other organizations, then, the KKP exhibited a significant degree of political and organizational heterogeneity that was typical of the Indian landscape.

For reasons that will be explored in the following chapter, the Sabha had a deep-rooted presence in the rural tracts of central Punjab. These included the districts of Amritsar, Jullundur, Hoshiarpur, Ludhiana, Lyallpur, and Lahore.[47] That made the Kirtis significantly different from largely urban-based leftist groups, though like other organizations it too was active in Lahore and Amritsar. The core constituency of the Sabha, then, were small landholding Sikh Jats, ironically the very same constituency that disproportionately contributed men to the British Indian Army.

How did political mobilization work in these tracts? A key role was played by returning migrants, particularly if they had spent time in Moscow. Naina Singh Dhoot, for example, speaks of establishing study circles in his village. He taught Punjabi to young boys and encouraged them to memorize poems that sang of freedom and revolution. He also trained them in public speaking. These lessons were followed by more academic discussions on major historical developments, world geography, and Marxism–Leninism. More importantly, as an eyewitness to the ongoing Revolution, he commanded the rapt attention of his audiences as he colourfully sketched a portrait of the sweeping changes taking place in the Soviet Union. That clearly afforded Dhoot an enviable social status, a fact that was not lost on him. As he saw it, it was his responsibility to educate and enlighten his fellow villagers. All this time they had been mired in 'ignorance' and 'illiteracy'. It was his task to 'awaken them from their decades old slumber and make them scientifically understand their socio-economic problems'.[48] Dhoot, however, was not the only comrade who viewed his society in seemingly patronizing and paternalistic ways. Indeed, his tone is replicated in virtually all accounts penned by leftists who saw their own journey to Marxism–Leninism as one from blind ignorance to enlightenment. Equally important, Dhoot's experience also highlighted the close relationship between political radicalism and migration. It also explains, in part, why leftist networks often worked along familial, caste, kinship, or even religious lines.

[47] IOR/L/P&J/12/300, 'Note on the Kirti-Kisan Sabha', p. 3 and PPSAI 1931, Lahore, 12 September, No. 36, p. 547.
[48] Dhoot, *Political Memoirs*, pp. 176–177.

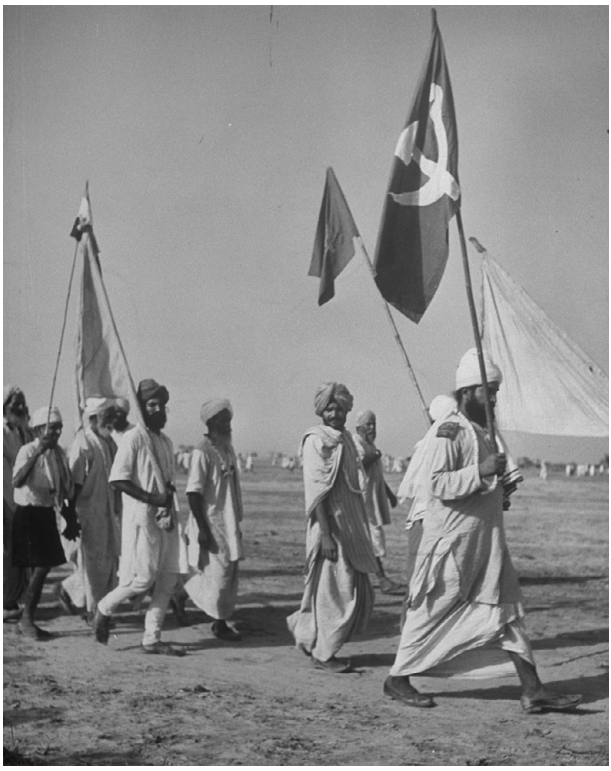
Dhoot also partly inspired Chain Singh Chain to 'embrace Marxism'. Born in 1917 – 'the year of the Russian Revolution', as he proudly noted – in the village of Danduwal in District Jullundur, Chain emerged in the late 1930s and 1940s as one of the leading members of the Punjab communist group. Like many others, Chain learnt his Marxism from elder comrades, revered for their 'sacrifices' and Moscow sojourns. In turn, Chain, and hundreds of activists like him, worked to spread the message of the Left in rural tracts. Study circles, rallies, agitations, strikes, public meetings, travelling theatre troupes, musicians, magic lantern shows, and *jathabandi* were all part of mobilizing strategies. It is difficult to assess how successful these strategies were, especially given the odds stacked against them. If membership is to be a criterion, by the early 1940s, the Punjab branch of the communist party claimed a membership base of a few thousand, while its affiliate provincial Kisan Sabha claimed a hundred thousand.[49] That said, these numbers were often misleading, not least because some members existed only on paper. Frequently, a small subscription along with a thumb print was the only requirement for membership in assorted Kisan Sabhas. Matters were further complicated in the case of multiple organizational affiliations, as was usually the case. What can be said with any certainty, though, is that leftist movements, with all their disparate factions and trade unions, managed to create a political impact that was far in excess of their actual strength.

Gendering Revolution

For the most part, leftist politics was a largely male affair. Or to be more specific, the leadership of the Left, and the Kirtis, in particular, was dominated by men. This was especially true in the earlier days of the movement. Over the course of successive decades, however, an increasing number of women joined and played a crucial role in the movement. This was as much a measure of the Left's successful outreach campaigns as it was a sign of changing times. By the 1930s and 1940s, most political groups, including the Muslim League and Congress, had vibrant and highly active women's wings.[50] In that sense, at least, the broader leftist movement was no different. Despite the significant role of women,

[49] PPSAI 1943, Lahore, 10 April, No. 15, p. 195. Also see Gurharpal Singh, *Communism in Punjab*, pp. 112–113, in which he has usefully tabulated this information along with other statistics.

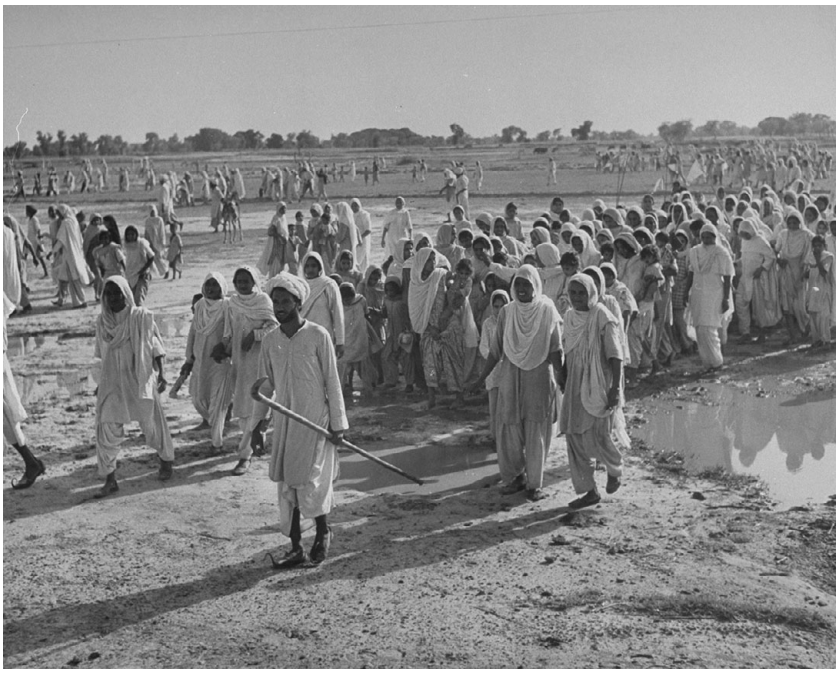
[50] That said, women had long been part of the political sphere, especially when it came to the persistence of the longstanding 'women's question' within the nationalist movement. See for example the seminal work of Partha Chatterjee, 'The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question', in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds.), *Recasting Women:*



4.3 Communists marching in the Harse Chhina agitation against decreased irrigation distribution in 1946.
Source: Photo by Margaret Bourke-White/The LIFE Picture Collection via Getty Images/Getty Images

however, there are very few – relatively speaking – (auto)biographical accounts of women within the communist and socialist movement. Even here, there is marked disparity between regions. More communist and revolutionary women from Bengal wrote about their experiences than

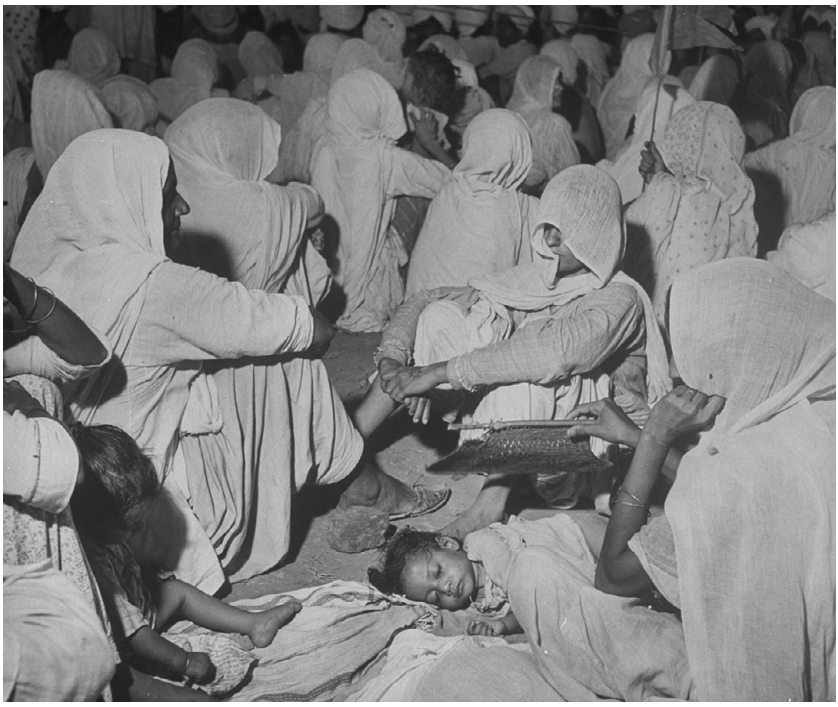
Essays in Indian Colonial History (Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. 233–253; Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism* (Permanent Black, 2001), and 'Nationalist Iconography: Image of Women in 19th Century Bengali Literature', *Economic and Political Weekly* 22, 47 (1987), 2011–2015. For an overview of women's mobilization within the Muslim League, see Ayesha Jalal, 'The Convenience of Subservience: Women and the State of Pakistan', in Deniz Kandiyoti (ed.), *Women, Islam & the State* (Temple University Press, 1991), and Dushka Saiyid, *Muslim Women of the British Punjab: From Seclusion to Politics* (Macmillan Press, 1998).



4.4 Peasants – men, women, and children – marching across fields in the 1946 communist-led Harse Chhina agitation.
Source: Photo by Margaret Bourke-White/The LIFE Picture Collection via Getty Images/Getty Images

their sisters elsewhere in the subcontinent. Nor are communist women commemorated or remembered in party histories to the extent their male comrades are. In contrast, women within the revolutionary and terrorist movement occupy a more prominent position in nationalist iconography and popular culture for their daring exploits. Communist work, after all, was considerably more banal, cumbersome, and unassuming than the spectacular acts of revolutionary and terrorist violence.

This did not mean that the work of communist women was any less remarkable. Among other biographies and accounts, the brief memoir of Vimla Dang provides a fascinating insight into the role and contribution of women within the communist movement. Born in 1926 to a relatively privileged Kashmiri Pandit family in Lahore, Dang joined the communist movement, and eventually, the Communist Party of India while still in her teens. Writing in the third person through a presumed name, Vimla recounted her activism, anxieties, hopes, experiences, and her difficulties in finding love within the movement. While still at school, she was



4.5 Women listening to a speaker at the Harse Chhina agitation.
Source: Photo by Margaret Bourke-White/The LIFE Picture Collection via Getty Images/Getty Images

introduced to communism by Suhashini Chattopadhyay, the only Indian woman to attend the Communist University of the Toilers of the East and the first woman to join the Communist Party of India. It was through Suhashini that Vimla learnt about the Soviet Revolution, the unparalleled sacrifices of the Soviet people, their remarkable achievements, and the astonishing progress that women had made in the Soviet Union. Suhashini also gave Vimla and her school friends an 'impressive portrait of Lenin' and spoke to them about 'self-cultivation' and 'self-improvement'. Meanwhile, Vimla's elder brothers had also joined the communist movement. Through her brothers, Vimla joined the Friends of Soviet Union in the early 1940s. Soon after, she also joined a cultural squad, a study circle for woman comrades, and worked with the CPI-linked All India Students Federation. Her years in Lahore before she moved to Bombay in 1944 were taken up by rallies, meetings, debates, and campaigns aimed at mobilizing women. In between, she also travelled to

Bengal for famine relief.[51] After she moved to Bombay, she worked as an active member of the Bombay Students Union.[52]

Vimla's fragmented memoir-cum-journal provides a glimpse into the freedoms, and restrictions, that came with a politically active life. Like many women in the movement, her route into communist politics was through her male relatives. Her role within the movement – in cultural activities, women's mobilization, famine relief, study circles, and so on – was also usual for other women members. But Vimla's life was unusual in another sense. Communism gave her a route to 'social liberation', to a life outside the confines of home. All this, Vimla, recognized, was possible in part because her family was largely supportive of her work. Indeed, her 'family was amongst the luckiest in the world'. 'The girls mixed freely with the boys,' she wrote. They also attended meetings, film shows, exhibitions, cultural programmes, debates, demonstrations, student campaigns, and rallies for communal harmony. For Vimla, 'this was an entirely different life, a new life, a life of constant struggle, of constantly aspiring to achieve something'.[53] It was also a life that was far removed from that of other women. A girl she knew was beaten by her father for working in the students' movement. She had also come across girls who had been taken out from schools and colleges and 'married off' because their parents feared they might join the communist movement. For the most part, she thought, 'a girl in an Indian home was entirely confined to the four walls of the house. She had no freedom as a girl, no rights as a wife, and no happiness as a mother.'[54]

[51] Ania Loomba notes that famine relief efforts supported the formation of the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) and the Communist Party's Central Cultural Squad as well as local cultural squads. In depicting the suffering caused by famine, activists and artists also created new forms of art and political mobilization. These experiences were also profoundly transformative for women activists, singers, and actresses who performed in front of enormous audiences and travelled to distant parts of the country training, rehearsing, and living with each other and their male comrades. See her chapter 'Dance of Hunger', in *Revolutionary Desires*. As far as an ever-sceptical intelligence service was concerned, however, the active participation of women in these cultural squads explained why they attracted large, predominantly, male audiences.

Other scholars, too, have extensively documented women's activism in the cultural squads and famine relief. See for example Elisabeth Armstrong, 'Indian Peasant Women's Activism in a Hot Cold War', in Vijay Prashad (ed.), *Communist Histories*, vol. 1 (LeftWord Books, 2016), pp. 176–217 and her account of nationalist and leftist women's activism in India. Also see Soma Marik, 'Breaking Through a Double Invisibility', *Critical Asian Studies* 45, 1 (2013), 79–118 for testimonies of women who participated in these campaigns. Renu Chakravarty in *Communists in Indian Women's Movement* also documents the role of women in various campaigns, and specifically in Bengal.

[52] Vimla Dang, *Fragments of an Autobiography* (Asha Jyoti Publishers, 2007), pp. 13–62.

[53] Ibid., p. 20. [54] Ibid., pp. 30–31.

There was, then, no straightforward way in which women could work within the communist movement. Even if they overcame familial restrictions, there were still formidable social restrictions to navigate. At the same time, these could also be employed for subversive purposes. As Kama Maclean has noted, revolutionary women frequently 'defied and appropriated norms and ideals around contemporary concepts of womanhood' in ways that enabled them to skirt the colonial state's intelligence and disciplinary networks.[55] Whether it was passing themselves off as 'respectable' women or as wives or sisters of revolutionaries and communists, or even men in disguise, women activists regularly negotiated gender conventions as part of their clandestine work.[56] And since political activities were often carried out under the cover of domesticity, the domestic sphere itself, as Ania Loomba notes, became an arena of political activity. The supposed distinction between the public and private, and the political and domestic, did not always hold for female activists. The political was personal inasmuch as the personal was political.[57]

In both defying and appropriating gender conventions, revolutionary and communist women did invaluable work for their organizations, especially in times when they were declared illegal and forced to operate underground. Kalpana Dutt, a 'terrorist' turned communist, recorded how she was entrusted with running the secret apparatus of the communist party in Chittagong, Bengal. Her work included the

> despatching of all Provincial Committee and Central Committee circulars, books, and papers … arranging for the sending of hands to different areas, fixing up shelters and dumps in the town, organizing the distribution of leaflets … and [conducting] study circles.[58]

Yet this was by no means all that women did. When she was still a 'terrorist', and affiliated with the revolutionary movement in Bengal,

[55] Kama Maclean, *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India*, p. 96. Through the iconic figure of Durga Devi, Maclean painstakingly constructs a history of women within the revolutionary movement, and specifically the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army (HSRA). For an excellent overview of women activists, see Suruchi Thapar-Bjorkert, *Women in the Indian National Movement: Unseen Faces and Unheard Voices, 1930–42* (Sage, 2006).

[56] In doing so, Durba Ghosh shows how these women also cast their activism within gendered conceptions of Indian nationalism. More perniciously, in narratives of their activism, whether produced by these women or by those allied to them, revolutionary women were still seen as conforming to a certain ideal of domesticated, middle-class, bourgeois-nationalist womanhood. Instead of taking away from – or for that matter adding to – their activism, these narratives indicate the enduring power of nationalist frames of the ideal 'bourgeois, nationalist, female subject'. See Durba Ghosh, 'Revolutionary Women and Nationalist Heroes in Bengal, 1930 to the 1980s', *Gender & History* 25, 2 (2013), 355–375.

[57] Loomba, *Revolutionary Desires*, p. 18.

[58] Dutt, *Chittagong Armoury Raiders: Reminiscences*, pp. 93–94.

Kalpana Dutt joined the Indian Republican Army, which carried out the famous Chittagong armoury raid in 1930. The raid, as the preface to Dutt's account noted, was 'one of the most stirring episodes' in India's liberation struggle.[59] Dutt herself escaped hanging because of her sex and young age, but was nevertheless sentenced to transportation for life.[60]

If Dutt's activism, whether in the revolutionary or communist movement, was at one end of the spectrum of activism for women, another was the set of roles that Vimla Dang performed. Other roles involved participating in more hallowed chambers, whether it was contesting elections or serving in legislative assemblies. In the Punjab, for instance, Bibi Raghbir Kaur, a Kirti activist who is repeatedly mentioned in contemporary leftist and official accounts, and on whom there is precious little in any published source, was elected to the provincial legislative assembly in the 1937 elections. In successive years, Kaur presided over women's conferences in Kirti heartlands. Even so, despite mass membership drives aimed at recruiting women[61] and the increasing numbers of female comrades within the movement, it remained true that much like the 'women's question' in the Soviet Union, the 'women's question' within the communist and revolutionary movement in India was subordinate to other objectives. Given India's colonial context, questions of women's emancipation and equality were accorded less importance in favour of the ostensibly more pressing task of liberating India from imperialist rule and bringing about a workers' and peasants' revolution. Still, even if there were attempts at domesticating and taming this history of activism,[62] revolutionary women carved out spaces and roles for themselves that could be as fulfilling, adventurous, and as significant as those of their male comrades. In doing so, they helped force the question of women's equality and emancipation on to the agenda of the leftist movement at large.

Living Revolution

Organizing and mobilizing, however, was only one small element of revolutionary lives. There is, unfortunately, little by way of details when

[59] Ibid., p. 3. The preface was written by P.C. Joshi, the first general secretary of the Communist Party of India. Joshi also later married Dutt in 1943. His characterization of the raid, which claimed the lives of dozens of policemen, military personnel, and revolutionaries, was typical for the post-colonial period in which episodes like the Chittagong raid are celebrated in popular culture and nationalist memory.

[60] Ibid., p. 86.

[61] Within the Kirti movement, Chain Singh Chain is the only figure who talks about it at any length. See Chain Singh Chain, *My Political Journey* (2008), pp. 58–62.

[62] See Ghosh, 'Revolutionary Women and Nationalist Heroes in Bengal'.

it comes to the personal lives of leftists. Being concerned primarily with their political lives, colonial reporting, barring the briefest of biographical details and familial relations, was virtually silent on private lives. Barring a few accounts, including those penned by women, the same is true for most leftist narratives, which present self-portraits of autonomous, dynamic, enterprising, adventurous, and tragically misunderstood men who made great sacrifices for their country and the revolution. Only a few of them provide a window into their personal lives. Fewer still explicitly recognized that the personal was also the political. Chain Singh Chain was one of the few who pursued that connection.

One of the things that stand out in Chain's autobiography is his commentary on the role that women played in the movement. In that, Chain's autobiography is markedly different from the accounts penned by his comrades. More importantly, Chain's account also mentions women who were ostensibly politically inactive. While his descriptions of the roles that women performed are far too brief, they do provide a glimpse into the all-too-frequent and involuntary sacrifices made by the women who were related to revolutionaries. There is little, if any, recognition of *this* contribution by women in political histories of the Left that pay attention only to those women who were 'active' within the movement. Their systematic erasure conceals the fact that the political adventures of revolutionaries were made possible in large measure by the invisible labour performed by women. It also conceals the fact that renowned revolutionaries were often far from ideal as husbands, fathers, and sons. For quite a few, one suspects, revolutionary politics offered an escape from domineering fathers and uncles, irascible children, and irate wives and mothers (as they saw them).

Chain, for instance, mentions how some of the comrades he held in high regard, including Bhagat Singh Bilga, were often at the receiving end of their wives' scolding. Writing in the 1990s, he commented that 'even now … comrades don't bother about the troubles and sacrifices of their wives'. Women were responsible for childcare, tending to livestock, cooking, attending to guests (of which the comrades had many), and other household chores. Most comrades, he recounted, did not share these responsibilities owing to their political commitments. Given this, the 'whine' of women was all but 'natural'.[63] Moreover, women presumably had to bear heavier burdens in the absence of their men, who were either away for political work or locked away in jail or, in extreme cases, transported to the Andamans. Sohan Singh Josh admitted as much when

[63] Ibid., p. 32.

he wrote how his family suffered while he was incarcerated for four years as a co-defendant in the iconic Meerut Conspiracy Case. While Josh was living up to his sobriquet and delivering fiery and impassioned speeches against British Imperialism in the courtroom, his wife and children had been struggling to survive. Small wonder, then, that an exhausted and penniless Josh was greeted on his return by his upset wife and his especially furious mother. Given what they had been through in his absence, it was difficult for Josh to placate his wife and mother by invoking the glory of national service and the romance of giving up one's life for the freedom of the working masses of India and the wider world.[64]

The same was true for Baba Bujha Singh. Like Naina Singh Dhoot, he too was in the batch of Ghadarites who went from Argentina to Moscow for political and military training. On his return to his village he was unrecognizable to his family. He had left with flowing hair and a beard, but he returned with a haircut and a clean shave. If that wasn't enough, he had also returned penniless. Like other revolutionaries, he too had gone abroad to earn money and improve his family's economic situation. But he returned merely with a burning ambition of freeing India from colonial rule and the small matter of emancipating mankind from subjugation.[65] That, however, was of little consolation to his father, who could only sulk at the 'vast villas' other returning migrants were building in his village.[66] The worst affected, however, was his wife, Dhani. She had spent six years of her 'prime life' without him and had already gone 'half crazy'. All this took place while she had also borne the burden of her two brothers-in-law and a sister-in-law. She appealed to Bujha Singh to give up his dreams. She needed him at home, she needed him to look after his children, his family, but he refused to budge from his chosen path. Her husband, as his biographer pithily put it, 'was thinking of all others [sic] families on the earth [sic]'. In the end, Dhani had to accept Bujha Singh's decision – 'she suppressed her feelings, buried all her wishes'.[67]

Frequently, the comrades often viewed such difficulties as yet another sacrifice *they* had to make. A cartoon from the *Kirti Lehar* titled 'Rewards of Patriotism in Hindustan makes this clear. Among the other 'rewards' listed – including hunger, poverty, police surveillance, transportation to the Andamans, and hangings – is a sketch of hungry wives and children.[68] Indeed, it was in recognition of this that the Desh Bhagat Qaidi

[64] Josh, *My Tryst with Secularism*, p. 186.
[65] Ajmer Sidhu, *From Ghadar to Naxalbari, Baba Bujha Singh: An Untold Story* (Tarkbharti Parkashan, 2013), p. 38.
[66] Ibid., p. 47. [67] Ibid., p. 38.
[68] *Kirti Lehar,* 'Hindustan may Hubb-ul-Watani ka Sila', 18 September [date unclear] 1938.

Pariwar Sahaik Committee (Committee for the Welfare of the Families of Imprisoned Patriots) was founded. As its name suggested, one of the Committee's express aims was to lend material support to the families of political prisoners. For many comrades, though, one way of dealing with their irritable families was not to deal with them at all. Bujha Singh, Dada Amir Haider, and Naina Singh Dhoot, among others, only spent a few days with their families before leaving for yet another self-declared 'historic task'. For an unfortunate few, like Bhagat Singh Bilga, spending time with their families was unavoidable, especially if they were sentenced to *nazarbandi*, or confinement to their villages. Given the choice, then, few comrades would have happily spent their time home with all the responsibilities that came with it. As Josh put it, for the youth of those days 'revolutionary work came first; everything else was relegated next'. After all, revolution was 'around the corner' and nothing could deter them from 'giving [their] life' for national liberation and revolution,[69] even if that meant suffering wives, sisters, mothers, and children.

This was where jails paradoxically worked as liberated spaces. Jails and detention camps afforded comrades the company of other comrades. In this fraternity of likeminded men, one could passionately discuss, debate, and reflect on the things that mattered, such as the pressing issue of world revolution. Free from domestic responsibilities and unhappy families, creativity, debate, and discussion could thrive. This was particularly the case in detention centres and prisons where political prisoners were housed collectively and allowed to meet and fraternize. Things obviously looked far different in torture chambers and solitary confinement. Speaking of their years incarcerated in detention camps, revolutionaries talked of the profoundly transformative impact of their detentions. Naina Singh Dhoot, for instance, spoke of how his cohort of political prisoners did not feel bored for the two years (1940–42) they were incarcerated in Deoli detention camp because they 'were engaged in extraordinarily interesting pursuits'. Pursuits like translating the iconic works of Marxism–Leninism – the *Communist Manifesto*, A. Leontiev's treatise on political economy, and the programme of the Comintern, among other things – into regional languages.[70] For that reason, Dhoot, Josh, and others spoke of jails as universities. Chain Singh Chain referred to it as a 'festival'. Still, there was an element of bravado in these descriptions. Incarceration could break individuals too, especially if they were tortured. But that was also a price worth paying. Aside from being the site of intellectual

[69] Josh, *My Tryst with Secularism*, p. 186. [70] Dhoot, *Political Memoirs*, p. 215.

fulfilment, writing,[71] and spectacular protests,[72] prison time could increase one's social and political standing, especially in a political culture where sacrifice and martyrdom, literally and metaphorically, were viewed as marks of honour, prestige, devotion, and commitment. Prison, then, did not only work as an escape at times, it also gave a way to revolutionaries to redeem and make a mark for themselves. If their experience did not irrecoverably break them, this was a moment of their political career they could be proud of.

But more significantly, prison time, torture, and even death, were viewed as necessary sacrifices by communists and revolutionaries. Such sacrifices, as Ammar Jan points out, were understood as acts that brought into existence a new political community and a new political subjectivity. Both were predicated on the recognition that the hand of history could be forced through volition and sacrifice.[73] Or, put differently, an emancipated future, even if foretold and promised, required the exercise of individual will and sacrifice. This, as Santokh Singh wrote in the *Kirti*, was the 'lesson of history'. This, indeed, was the price that India had to pay for her freedom, a price that was no different from what other peoples had paid to win their freedom.

Bina Das made much the same point in her memoirs. Remembered as one of India's most iconic revolutionary women, Das at the age of 21 was sentenced to nine years' rigorous imprisonment for her failed assassination attempt of Bengal's Governor in 1932. She served seven of those nine years. Reflecting on her incarceration much later in life, she wrote that 'prison life was not a period of total loss'. Notwithstanding the fact that few in her position would have admitted otherwise, even to themselves, Das viewed her time in prison as a price that she simply had to

[71] Indeed, David Arnold views prison writings as a genre in their right in the larger spectrum of Indian life histories. See David Arnold, 'The Self and the Cell: Indian Prison Narratives as Life Histories', in David Arnold and Stuart Blackburn (eds.), *Telling Lives in India: Biography, Autobiography, and Life History* (Indiana University Press, 2004).

[72] One of the most notable of which was the 63-day hunger strike of Jatindranath Das in Lahore jail. Das's strike only concluded with his death. His sacrifice captured the imagination of revolutionaries and nationalists across India. Tied to this is Neeti Nair's claim that more than the murder of Saunders, it was the protests and hunger strikes of Bhagat Singh and his comrades within prison walls that catapulted them to the status of national heroes. See Neeti Nair, 'Bhagat Singh as "Satyagrahi": The Limits to Non-Violence in Late Colonial India', *Modern Asian Studies* 43, 3 (May 2009), 649–681.

[73] Moreover, in Jan's reading, volition and sacrifice were viewed as necessary because of India's historical specificity, and hence, historical certainty. Sacrifice, in other words, could overcome what Jan identifies as the loss of historical certainty. This was, in his view, a new practice of Marxism that sought to address the specificity of India in ways that orthodox Marxist laws of history could not. See Ammar Ali Jan, 'In the Shadow of Ghadar: Marxism and Anti-Colonialism in Colonial Punjab', *Socialist Studies / Études socialistes* 13, 2 (2018), 73–74.

4.6 Gurmukh Singh Lalton – Ghadarite, and one of the principal figures in the *Komagata Maru* incident, Ghadar rebellion and the First Lahore Conspiracy Case – being greeted on his return to Ludhiana in 1946 after many decades of first exile and then incarceration in the Andamans.
Source: Amarjit Chandan Collection

pay. She had been asked by others whether those seven years had been worth it. Those close to her also lamented that she lost the best years of her life. She too, for that matter, recognized that she could have received a scholarship for higher studies in distant climes. She could have found a high- salaried job on her return too. And yet, she was reluctant to describe those seven long interminable years as time lost. Indeed, how could she simply write off that period of her life? Surely, there had to be some way to make meaning of what would otherwise have been a complete waste of precious time. 'We never bowed to the pressure of conflicts and chastisements of prison,' she wrote. Nor did they 'succumb to the pain of suffering'.[74] She did not blame those who succumbed either.

[74] Das, *A Memoir*, pp. 37–38.

4.7 Noted Ghadarite, 'Baba' Jawala Singh, lying in state surrounded by comrades. Jawala Singh died in a bus accident in 1938 on his way to the All India Kisan Conference. The banners in the background proclaim Jawala Singh as a patriot and leader of workers and peasants, and as a founder of the revolutionary movement. The woman sitting to the immediate right of Jawala Singh's body is Raghbir Kaur, the only communist woman MLA elected to the Punjab Assembly in the 1936–37 elections. Standing right behind is Sohan Singh Bhakna.
Source: Amarjit Chandan Collection

Some of the excruciating methods applied by the police – beatings, electric shocks, lying on ice blocks, inserting pins in fingernails, and so on – were far beyond what was humanly bearable.[75] But there was a 'secret source of strength' that sustained Das and her fellow revolutionaries in those difficult years. They knew, she wrote, that this chapter of their lives, with all its gains and losses, 'was a part of history, the history of a nation fighting the battle of freedom'. Therein lay their 'deepest consolation', their 'most profound sense of fulfilment'.[76] In an aphorism that would have resonated with other revolutionaries too, it was History that demanded this sacrifice of her. Or put another way, her

[75] Ibid., p. 22. [76] Ibid., pp. 37–38.

suffering was an 'atonement' for the 'country's accumulated sins'. For that reason alone, jail was a 'hundred times better' than living a life of guilt that was sure to follow had that sacrifice not been made. What was more, jail also offered 'other compensations'. 'There was no better place', she reflected, where a person could 'turn inwards' and 'know oneself'.[77] Prison, then, more than simply being a site of regulation, punishment, and discipline, could also at the same time be a site of self–actualization and self–realization. And should there be any doubt about the values that political prisoners ought to abide by, there were always dreams to help them on their way. Lenin himself, Das claimed, came to her in a dream with words of advice on the responsibilities of political prisoners.[78]

This trial of fire, then, created a political subject that was unique in the Indian political landscape. No other political movement demanded as steep a sacrifice as a cause that sought to overcome and conquer History itself. That, at rate, was how these revolutionaries saw their role in History. They thought of their lives, as Bina Das put it, as 'totally consecrated to the cause of liberty'. For her, the slogan *karen-ge ya maren-ge* (do or die) perfectly captured revolutionary sentiments at the time.[79] It is worth pointing out, though, that underpinning this political subjectivity was a *politics of disavowal*. This politics disavowed the past, tradition, selfhood, social convention, material comforts, personal ambition, familial relations, and anything else that that was considered an obstacle on the road to revolution.[80] To own this time meant disowning everything that held the future back. Yet, this politics was not like the politics of renunciation that Gandhian nationalism represented. That politics arguably sought to disavow the modern, material world. In contrast, the revolutionary politics of disavowal sought to claim, conquer, and reorient the modern world. Put differently, the world of the old had to be disavowed to make a world of the new.

For revolutionaries, communists, and assorted radicals, then, the party, the movement, the group, the faction, and above all, the 'people', *were* family.[81] 'We cannot stop to think of our parents,' Bina Das quoted her fellow revolutionaries to be saying. Much the same was true for their parents, who often turned them out of their homes.[82] And as Vimla Dang noted, revolutionary women, unless they came from politically

[77] Ibid., pp. 38–39. [78] Ibid., pp. 80–82. [79] Ibid., p. 21. [80] See p. 16.
[81] The biographer of Bujha Singh put it well: 'He no longer belonged to a single family. He belonged to all the people.' Ajmer Sidhu, *Baba Bujha Singh*, p. 38.
[82] Das, *A Memoir,* p. 16.

progressive or communist families, were more vulnerable to family sanction, abuse, and social boycott for their activism.[83] In contrast, men had more of a choice in the matter. They risked less in alienating their families than women did in alienating theirs. That being the case, it was often the party that provided a home and a sense of belonging, an identity, and rootedness for homeless and exiled revolutionaries. Scholars have made this point in relation to communist parties and Comintern cadres. The party, broadly put, 'offered membership of a group and with it a social identity – an identity that even allowed one to escape one's origins and place in society'. To be a communist, in this world, meant to have a 'complete social identity, one which transcended the limits of class, gender, nationality'. To that, one can plausibly add other personal and social affiliations too.[84]

Matters were equally complicated when it came to relationships within the party. Given the problems that came with reconciling his personal and revolutionary life Chain Singh Chain initially decided to free himself of the 'shackles' and 'bondage' of marriage. In that he was hardly alone. He had been engaged twice before, but on both occasions he managed to 'free' himself of his obligations. He eventually broke his 'pledge' in the 1940s at the behest of the Communist Party. Prior to his arrest in 1941/42, Chain met comrade Sushila Kumari who ran from home aged 18 with dreams of revolution. She made her way to the house of another female comrade and soon after joined the Communist Party. And while her work was lauded by local party committees, they still recommended to the central committee that she be 'married off' to avoid unnecessary scandals. Such *farzi shadis* were usual for women working in the party.[85] They could either be married to other comrades, with both pledging to dedicate their lives to the party, or they could live as 'sisters' to other underground comrades to pass themselves off as unassuming families. As ever, there were good reasons for this too.

[83] Also see Soma Marik, 'Breaking Through a Double Invisibility', *Critical Asian Studies* 45, 1 (2013), 79–118, for her excellent overview of testimonies from women communists and revolutionaries. See in particular the testimony of Bani Dasgupta.

[84] Studer, *The Transnational World of the Cominternians*, p. 4.

[85] Ania Loomba, in *Revolutionary Desires*, offers fascinating insights into *farzi shadis* and relationships within the party. See her chapter on 'Commune-ism'. As she notes, the concept of *farzi shadis* could be translated in different ways. She offers the translation of 'contract marriages'. 'Assumed' or 'pretend' marriages could be another translation. More broadly, however, Loomba's work is crucial for the insights she provides into the private lives of revolutionary and communist women in India. Her book is a valuable addition to recent works that have sought to uncover the private, domestic lives of communists, of which the most magisterial example is Yuri Slezkine's *House of Government*.

Social opprobrium aside, an underground party could hardly afford a sexual scandal. What is more, these *shadis* could be marriages in name only and/or 'actual' marriages carried out in the line of duty.[86] That was certainly the case with Sushila. Pressed by the party, she agreed to marry on the condition that the marriage not be consummated. Given his pledge, Chain was the only local male comrade willing to accept her condition. Both were married along with another 'party couple' in a small ceremony in a 'red' village. In their few months of 'married' life before Chain was arrested, he and Sushila hardly met, and even when they did, it was only for political work. Even after his arrest, Sushila never visited him, and only wrote letters like any comrade would. Until then, there had not been any 'personal talk', a problem for Chain, who had begun thinking of making their marriage into a 'real one' (prison time had clearly affected him in other ways too). It was only after his release a year later, in 1943, that Chain and Sushila decided to 'formalize' their marriage. Here, too, they first had to formally ask the party for its consent. For her part, Sushila took the decision in part to ward off the advances of another comrade who eventually got Chain suspended from the party after the marriage became 'real'.[87]

That said, matters could go in a different direction too. Within the intimate proximity of the party and, occasionally, communal living, it was perhaps only natural that affections, love, and jealousies could develop too.[88] That, certainly, was the case with Vimla Dang. Her memoir provides a fascinating insight into the (im)possibilities of finding love within the party. In Bombay, she fell in love with a comrade and future husband, Satyapal Dang, but their mutual feelings remained unexpressed because of party work and an awkward 'friendship' expressed in terms of the familiar idiom of a brotherly/sisterly relationship.[89] It was only much later (on the eve of independence, and that too in Prague) that they confessed their love for each other.[90] Clearly, then, love could be found within the movement.

It is more difficult to say this with certainty in the case of Chain Singh Chain and Sushila Kumari. In Chain's narration, they led a happily

[86] Loomba, *Revolutionary Desires*, p. 131.
[87] Chain, *My Political Journey*, pp. 58–61, 66–67, and 80–81.
[88] Here too Ania Loomba provides a fascinating glimpse of what (love) life looked like in the Bombay commune. See her chapter on 'commune-ism'. What is more, in the socially liberated atmosphere of the movement, women were also on occasion approached by men attracted by the concept of 'free love'. Kalpana Dutt mentions these (unwanted) overtures briefly in her account too. *Chittagong Armoury Raiders*, p. 92.
[89] Indeed, anyone who has dated in South Asia would be familiar with this conundrum.
[90] Dang, *Fragments*, pp. 38–83.

married life. For what it's worth though, their lives provide a little-known, but crucial, insight into the control that the party exercised over the lives of its cadres.[91] For many, to dedicate oneself to revolution meant surrendering to party discipline and dictates, even when it came to sexual and familial relations. Put another way, one had to *live* the revolution. But the extent to which these relations overturned gender hierarchies was another question altogether. Did Sushila really marry Chain out of her choice? Or did she consummate her marriage to maintain her position and, one suspects, her peace of mind? There is no way of knowing. Unlike Chain, she was under greater pressure to marry, initially in the '*farzi*' sense, to fulfil party dictates, and later in the 'actual' sense, to ward off advances from other men. Sushila and Chain's lives, then, serve as a salutary reminder that behind political work lay political lives that were impacted by relationships, jealousies, desires, and personal circumstances as much as they were driven by utopian dreams – lives that were, in other words, all too human. But more than that, these stories remind us of the inordinate and unique burdens placed on women. There is no doubt that communism afforded them a degree of social liberation that would have inconceivable in other social and political formations. But even then, they often had to carry burdens that few among them had asked for, even for a political project that ostensibly promised them complete equality and autonomy.

Print Worlds

Publications were another important plank in political mobilization. Indeed, no history of revolutionary and communist politics can be complete without a comment on the crucial role that print worlds played in the political sphere. All organizations, left and right, big and small, had their flagship publications, with many 'publishers' and 'printing houses' operating out of houses on cyclostyle machines. Publications served a number of purposes: as party mouthpieces, as newspapers, as propaganda materials, and as instruction manuals and guidelines for party activists. The Kirti Kisan Party too, brought out a variety of publications. Despite being embedded in a largely non-literate region, Kirti publications were typical for a political landscape with a thriving print culture. For Sohan Singh Josh, who replaced Santokh Singh as 'editor-in-chief',

[91] There has hardly been any work on the social and domestic lives of Indian revolutionaries. Most histories on the Left, including admittedly this one, are concerned with the political, hardly ever the personal, or even on how the personal was implicated in, and constitutive of, the political.

the *Kirti* was not merely a 'propaganda paper'. It was also 'a mobilizer and organizer' with a mission to organize workers and peasants around class struggle.[92]

Santokh Singh's successors shared his view on the importance of publications. Soon after the *Kirti* was launched, an Urdu edition was introduced with a view of spreading the *Kirti*'s appeal beyond the Sikh community.[93] Later, other publications were added, such as the weekly *Mazdur Kisan*, published in both Gurumukhi and Urdu, the *Mehnat Kash*, *Naujawan Kirti Kisan*, *Kirti Lehar*, *Lal Dhandora*, *Lal Jhanda*, and *Rising Youth* and the *New Era*, both published in English.[94] Together, *Kirti* journals were viewed as the 'the movement's most active missionaries to the peasants and working classes of the Punjab'.[95] None of these papers, however, had a particularly long life. They were frequently proscribed and often short on funds. Issues of the *Kirti*, for example, were repeatedly proscribed with several cases launched against its 'dummy editors' (listed to protect the identities of the real editors).[96] Publications from other organizations also suffered the same fate.

Together, these publications marked a new age. They also marked a distinct shift in political culture. If not short on funds, a typical publication contained local, national, and international news stories; commentaries on them; updates on political activities; announcements for future rallies, meetings, and agitations; political demands; critiques of rivals; serialized pieces; social and political advice, often didactic in tone; illustrations, cartoons, pictures of rallies and agitations, and portraits of activists, leaders, prisoners, and martyrs; and poems serving as a stirring call to action. Remarkably, for publications targeted at specific and locally situated constituencies, in this case Punjabi workers and peasants, virtually every *Kirti* publication covered international developments, international revolutionary movements and, last but not least, the glowing progress of the Soviet Union. These were underpinned by calls for internationalist solidarity. And how could they not? As Santokh Singh put it, the day was not far off when

> Chinese and Siamese, on a holiday, for an afternoon excursion, will fly to Chandni Chowk in Delhi and back home. If Hindustan's *tongas* and the Chinese and Japanese human propelled rickshaws [had] not been able to

[92] Josh, *My Tryst with Secularism*, p. 116.
[93] PPSAI 1928, Supplement I, Lahore, 5 May, No. 18, p. 201.
[94] PPSAI 1931, Lahore, 7 February, No. 6, p. 94; IOR/L/P&J/12/300, 'Note on the Kirti-Kisan Sabha', pp. 5–6; PPSAI 1931, Lahore, 18 April, No. 16, p. 256; PPSAI 1931, Simla-E, 30 May, No. 21, p. 338.
[95] IOR/L/P&J/12/300, 'Note on the Kirti-Kisan Sabha', p. 1.
[96] Ibid., p. 5. Josh also mentions this practice in his autobiography.

prevent railway trains coming [to India] from Europe, how in the future will India build an iron wall around her to keep herself aloof from Europe, America and the rest of the world? The programme of our freedom should be based not only on the conditions – social, economic, and political – prevailing in India, but also take into consideration the situation prevailing in the world.[97]

As ever, the repeated invocation of history was crucial to this project of emancipation. History provided lessons to the working classes. It reminded them of their glorious and victorious genealogy of struggle as much as it provided a salutary lesson that true freedom required sacrifices. It was this history that had been deliberately obfuscated and erased by imperialism and the ruling classes. The *Kirti*, then, would shed light on the 'forgotten pages of history' and place the working class's proud legacy of glorious struggle before them, especially at a time when 'the reins of the world' were coming into their hands.[98]

Tied to these salient messages were innovative and evocative experiments in both form and content. Both were necessary, and inevitable, for what for many saw as the requirements of a new era. As Sohan Singh Josh put it, the publication of the *Kirti* in February 1926 was 'the harbinger of a new epoch'. By focusing on working people, it introduced a 'new ideology' into the Punjab. This new ideology, he claimed, had 'launched an offensive against the old, outmoded, and obscurantist belief of status quoism [sic] of fatalism. This, somewhat, loosened the dead hand of the past. The ice was broken [and] new ideas began to take root.'

Again, the repeated invocation of newness is significant here. And this mood is reflected in the *Kirti*'s writings, as it is in other leftist publications of the time. To take a small example, Josh commented on how prominent Punjabi poets experimented with ideas and new poetic registers and meters. Through their 'revolutionary' poems, they not only depicted the dismal condition of the working masses and the downtrodden but also advanced a vision of the future. One particularly striking note in these poems is a sense of inhabiting tumultuous and exciting times, which will inevitably lead to a utopic age. Only if 'time' took 'its normal course according to its own laws' there would, one day, be a workers' Raj in India.[99] Even if those laws required, as they inevitably did, great sacrifices from those historically tasked with ushering in that promised age.

Though Josh did not mention it, the literary registers he briefly alluded to were very much part of their times. Through their poetry, Punjabi

[97] Josh, *My Tryst with Secularism*, pp. 104–105. [98] Ibid. [99] Ibid., pp. 113, 114.

radical poets were participating in a wider literary movement that could be traced back to the late nineteenth century in colonial India, which, in both poetry and prose, claimed reformist and progressive ideals, and loosely adhered to the conventions of social realism. Many seemed inspired by the ethic of socialist realism developing in the Soviet Union. These otherwise vastly disparate literary interventions culminated in the founding of the Progressive Writers' Association in 1935/36. Co-founded by Sajjad Zaheer, leading member of the CPI and later founder of the Communist Party of Pakistan, the manifesto of the PWA noted 'the radical changes' taking place in India and condemned the 'spirit of reaction' that was partly fed by a moribund, fatalistic, degenerate, rigid, formalistic, and all too traditional literature. What was demanded of a 'new literature' befitting a new age was an engagement with 'the basic problems of hunger and poverty, social backwardness and political subjection'. It was the duty of Indian writers, then, to 'assist the spirit of progress in the country' and pave the way to the future envisaged by progressives.[100]

Needless to suggest, this was very much the tone and tenor of leftist publications. Whether they were directly influenced by the Progressive Writers movement or not, these publications were still part of the prevailing literary *zeitgeist*. And while it is difficult to estimate circulation figures or impact in a largely non-literate rural society, the *Kirti* and other leftist publications were widely circulated in several arenas. In addition to their largely rural audiences, *Kirti* issues were smuggled to Punjabi communities overseas, distributed in schools and colleges, and at political rallies, whether organized by the Left or other organizations like the Congress.[101] For the police, these publications often seemed to achieve their desired effect, as evidenced by the conviction of a few *Kirti*-subscribing students for a train dacoity.[102]

Funding Revolution

All this obviously required a regular line of funding. Finances were one of the most contentious questions the *Kirti* group had to confront. The

[100] See Manifesto of Progressive Writers' Association. Also see Priyamvada Gopal, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation and the Transition to Independence* (Routledge, 2005), specifically the introduction and the first chapter, and Talat Ahmed, *Literature and Politics in the Age of Nationalism: The Progressive Writers' Movement in South Asia, 1932–56* (Routledge, 2009).

[101] PPSAI 1928, Supplement I, Lahore, 5 May, No. 18, p. 200; PPSAI 1931, Simla-E, 27 June, No. 25, p. 400; PPSAI 1930, Lahore, 4 January, No. 1, p. 12.

[102] PPSAI 1930, Lahore, 18 January, No. 3, pp. 62–63.

British had long suspected that communist groups in the subcontinent were kept afloat through Moscow's beneficence. For the year 1928, for example, a sum totalling 73,000 rupees was 'known to have been received in India from Communist or suspect sources abroad'.[103] Usually, these funds were sent by trade unions and communist bodies in the Soviet Union or elsewhere – usually Great Britain – for their sister unions in India. For the government, these remittances posed a legal problem, since it was difficult to trace these funds back to the Comintern and/or the Soviet government.[104] For those reasons, it was often difficult to block remittances in every case.

Much like other communist groups in India, the Kirti Party, through its connections with the Ghadar–Comintern alliance, was suspected to profit from 'Moscow Gold'. In 1927, for instance, it was estimated that the *Kirti* had to its credit a not inconsiderable sum of 40,000 rupees.[105] For roughly the same period, Sohan Singh Josh put the figure at 16,000 rupees.[106] It is, of course, difficult to assess the veracity of either claim. For one, there is little to suggest in memoirs and other sources from the Left that it was in receipt of funds from the Soviet Union. To admit this would have effectively been an admission of being an agent of a foreign, enemy, power. Such an admission would have been equally damaging not just in the eyes of the state but also the nationalist movement, which later played a key role in casting the communists as a fifth column of the Soviets. Even for those penning their memoirs well after independence, such an admission would have been damaging. Dada, for instance, was repeatedly asked how much pay he received from Moscow. For those reasons, few would have admitted to 'enriching' themselves through their Soviet connections. That said, there was scant evidence of this being the case. As Dada pointed out, the miserable and unenviable living conditions of the communist leadership were reason enough to put an end to this speculation.[107]

The Kirti Sabha made similar denials. Josh claimed that their work was generously supported by subscriptions and donations. In the courtroom,

[103] IOR/L/P&J/12/321, 'Remittances from Moscow & Co. to India', 'Weekly IB Report, Home Department, GOI', p. 16. Part of the reason for this largesse also was that this was the year of crippling mill strikes in Bombay, drafting of the Trade Disputes Bill, and other legislation designed to impede British communists in a time of their heightened mobilization in India.

[104] IOR/L/P&J/12/320, 'Remittance from the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics to the All India Railwaymen's Union Federation of Calcutta (Question of policy to be adopted as regards remittances sent to India from organizations outside)'.

[105] PPSAI 1927, Simla-E, 2 July, No. 25, p. 245.

[106] NAI/MCCP 218, 'Statement', p. 302.

[107] Gardezi (ed.), *Chains to Lose*, vol. II, p. 559.

as well as through the pages of the *Kirti*, Josh declared that the Kirtis had no direct connection with Bolshevik Russia, nor did they receive any material help from the Russian people. The sole caveat? Trade unions. Indian trade unions, Josh claimed, were well within their rights to accept material support from workers abroad, including Russian workers. After all, internationally organized capital could only be overthrown by internationally organized labour.[108] Still, it could not be denied that the *Kirti* was in receipt of 'foreign money'. Ghadar money and funds from the Indian diaspora also went towards supporting the party and its flagship publication. Much like other Punjabi organizations outlined in the first chapter, the Kirti Sabha received 'subscriptions' and 'donations' from North America and far-flung regions such as Fiji, Hong Kong, Java, Uganda, and Panama.[109] The *Kirti* was regularly smuggled to Punjabi communities abroad who in turn sent remittances through returning migrants. In some cases, returnees were sent for the explicit purpose of overseeing whether or not their hard-earned money was being put to good use.[110] These sources were in turn supplemented by somewhat more dubious sources such as the occasional (and alleged) pilferage of local gurdwara funds.[111] Taken together, then, the Kirti Sabha was, as an intelligence report put it, the 'beneficiary of the underwriting of political revolution'.[112]

There is some truth to this statement. Irrespective of the exact amounts involved, the party and its flagship publication had enviable sums at its disposal. How do we know this? For one, the Sabha could pay punitive fines regularly imposed by the provincial government on their journals. It could also pay salaries to some of its leadership and cadre. And, together with the Desh Bhagat Qaidi committee, the Sabha could lend some financial support to the families of political prisoners. Somewhat ironically, the best evidence for the Sabha's relatively comfortable financial standing comes from the bitter internal disputes relating to embezzlement and financial misappropriation. These were divisions that the CID (Criminal Investigation Department) was quick to exploit. In 1932, for instance, four leading members of the party, including the venerable F.D. Mansur, were accused of bribery and maladministration. The police, having caught wind of this dispute, were quick to raid the

[108] NAI/MCCP 218, 'Statement', pp. 301–303. Also see the *Kirti* of June 1928, and Josh, *My Tryst with Secularism*, pp. 111–112.
[109] IOR/V/27/262/5, 'India and Communism 1935', p. 277 and PPSAI 1927, Lahore, 3 December, No. 47, pp. 611–613.
[110] PPSAI 1928, Supplement 1, Lahore, 5 May, No. 18, p. 200 and PPSAI 1927, Lahore, 3 December, No. 47, p. 612.
[111] PPSAI 1931, Lahore, 29 August, No. 34, p. 531.
[112] PPSAI 1927, Simla-E, 2 July, No. 25, p. 245.

party's office and confiscate its account books. The result? The accused were unable to prove their innocence, leading to lingering suspicion and bad blood within the party. Indeed, infighting over finances got so bitter occasionally that the party's Ghadar patrons in North America were forced to cut their flow of funding for brief periods.[113] All this was, predictably, music to the ears of colonial officials. Owing to their infighting, the Kirti Sabha, some opined, was 'incapable of doing really constructive work'.[114]

On Factionalism

It was not merely for reasons of money that leftist politics in Punjab, as elsewhere, became a byword for factionalism. Consider the following excerpt from a police report in 1933:

> A meeting of considerable importance was held during the week at Amritsar, when representatives of all the various communist parties and organizations were present, including the Kirti Kisans, Naujawan Bharat Sabha, and League against Imperialism, as well as terrorists, Congressites, and anti-untouchability enthusiasts. The object in holding the meeting was for a single party, in which all existing organizations would be merged and which would provide a common platform for agitators of every shade of thought. It remains to be seen whether this organization will meet any more success than similar unity attempts in the past, which have been quickly wrecked by personal jealousies and fractious controversies.[115]

The wry comment at the end gave an indication of the all-too-predictable outcome of this attempt. Except for a brief period in the 1940s, Punjab could not claim to have a united communist group. Even this all-too-brief united front was at loggerheads with socialists and Congress leftists. To all intents and purposes, then, the dream of leftist, and at the very least 'communist', unity remained an illusion.

Why was it so difficult to forge a united front? It certainly was not for lack of trying. But each attempt foundered in the face of daunting odds, many of which were of the Left's own making. Disputes of financial expropriation aside, personal jealousies and heated arguments over tactics and ideas all played a role in further fracturing a weak Left. The government, for its part, also played a crucial role. Frequent arrests, even more frequent crackdowns, proscriptions of organizations and publications, and round-the-clock surveillance of leftist activists, or the constant threat of it, ensured that there was little by way of organizational and institutional continuity within the Left. For example, before Sohan Singh Josh and M.A. Majid were released in

[113] PPSAI 1933, Supplement No. IV, Simla-E, 20 May, No. 19, p. 249.
[114] Ibid., p. 251. [115] My emphasis. PPSAI 1933, Lahore, 28 October, No. 41, p. 495.

1933 following the anticlimactic end to the Meerut Conspiracy Case, they had hoped to continue playing a leading role in the Kirti Party. They had said as much in a message smuggled to their supporters from jail a month after their arrest in March 1929. That message was published in the *Kirti*. After noting their hapless condition as 'victims' of their 'exploiters wrath', and their 'humble contribution' and 'humble services' to 'humanity' and to kindling 'the fire of conscious determination in the masses to be free and happy in this land', they confidently declared:

> We trust by the time we return we shall have the opportunity and good fortune to offer our services for a much stronger and grown up movement, and nothing will please us more than an occasion to put ourselves in the movement as soldiers in the fight line – 'Long Live Free India'.[116]

By the time they were freed, nothing of what they had hoped for had come to pass. Four years was long time in politics. By then, there were two Kirti Kisan parties, each calling themselves the 'real' party, and two Naujawan Bharat Sabhas, each accusing the other of being imposters. The party leadership was in unfamiliar and distinctly unqualified hands, or so Josh claimed. To make matters worse, the warm and ecstatic reception they were understandably hoping for did not materialize. They had either been forgotten or were ignored by their former comrades.[117]

As important as Josh's personal predicaments were, a more significant development had taken place in his absence. In a development that will be explored more fully in Chapters 5 and 6, the leftist movement in India was well on its way to splitting along ideological lines by the 1930s. The split in Punjab was not merely along the lines of 'socialists' or 'communists', but also along those who considered themselves doctrinaire and orthodox communists versus those who adopted a more pragmatic and contextual approach to politics. These terms, while partly an imposition on my part, are still reflective of the way that individuals on either side of the divide characterized themselves. This split was especially acute between Josh's camp and his erstwhile Kirti comrades, and it was this split that was to define Punjabi communism over the interwar period and beyond. For Josh, the Kirti Party had been taken over by radicals with little or no understanding of Marxism–Leninism. For their detractors, Josh and his compatriots were urbane, highbrowed Marxist ideologues with little or no understanding of grassroots politics. Few, indeed, expressed this division more eloquently than Bhagat Singh Bilga, Ghadar leader in Argentina, Moscow returnee, Kirti stalwart, and iconic

[116] *Kirti*, May 1929, pp. 123–124. [117] Josh, *My Tryst with Secularism*, pp. 188–189.

figure of the Punjabi left: *sanu angrezi nahin si aaundi, ohnaa nu siyasat* (We did not know English and they did not know politics).[118]

The involvement of the Comintern considerably raised the stakes in these debates. Consider, for example, the following excerpt, reproduced verbatim from a handwritten report filed by an Indian activist before the Comintern:

M.A. Majid

Left India in 1920 with the Hijrat Movement. Came to USSR. Studied in Moscow and Tashkent.

Returned to India 1925. Served one years imprisonment.

One of the founders of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha (youth organization) in the Punjab 1926.

Member of CPI since its inception.

Founder of Punjab W&P Party.

Arrested in the Meerut Conspiracy Case – Sentenced to 10 years.

Since release (Nov 1933) has not been very active.

He is very reliable and sincere comrade.[119]

Sohan Singh (Josh)

A Punjabi.

First arrested in the Akali Conspiracy Case 1923.

After release assisted in the formation of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha and the W&P Party of Punjab.

On the Editorial Board of 'Kirti' 1926 – 27 – 28.

Took part in Peasant movement in Punjab.

Arrested in March 1929. Meerut Conspiracy Case.

Released in Nov. 1933.

Recently Presided over Peasant conference. Considered member of CPI since 1926.

Reliable + Sincere.

While in Prison translated into Gurmukhi some of Lenin's works also Stalin's Leninism.[120]

[118] Interview with Amarjit Singh Chandan, 12 November 2004.
[119] (Compiled by) L.A. Kirijevstaja, 'Information about Leading Figures of the Communist Party of India', F. 495, Inv. 16, File 59, f. 78.
[120] Ibid., f. 80.

Joglikar

Bombay – Intellectual.

One of the founder members of the CP – connected with CP since 1924.

Wide knowledge of T.U. Work among Railway and Textile Workers.

Arrested in March 1929 in the Meerut Conspiracy Case.

Sentenced to 12 years imprisonment.

Released in Nov 1933.

Rearrested in connection with the Textile Workers General Strike 1934.

At present under deportation order in Bombay.

Charged with Factionalism and inactivity.[121]

Muzaffar Ahmad – Bengal

Intellectual Foundation.

Member of CPI.

Convicted in the Cawnpore Conspiracy Case (Communist) 1924 to 4 years rigorous imprisonment.

Released middle of 1927.

Began to organize Workers and Peasants Party (Bengal).

Edited Paper *Lal Nishan*.

Took part in T.U. and Strike activity.

Arrested in the Meerut Conspiracy Case (Communist) March 1929.

Sentenced to Life Transportation.

Released end of 1934.

Rearrested and kept under detention until middle of 1926 [*sic*], then released.

Recently Presided over a Peasant Conference in Punjab.

Extremely bad health. T.B.

Good Theoretical Basis.

Very reliable and Sincere Comrade.[122]

While the list goes on, the excerpt gives a fairly good idea of what these reports were about. Catalogued as part of a hefty file entitled 'Information About Leading Figures of the Communist Party of India', such reports were indicative of a political culture in which communists were regularly vetted for their ideological and political suitability. These reports were not simply compiled in Moscow. They were also sent from India. Official

[121] Ibid., f. 87. [122] Ibid., f. 91.

(and officious-sounding) reports, communiqués, handwritten letters, pamphlets, newsletters, and other party publications were regularly sent to Moscow. All too often, this literature denounced rivals, with alleged crimes ranging from ideological deviancy and political ineptitude to drinking and womanizing.[123] In a similar vein, fractious debates between the Kirtis and the 'Official Group', led by Josh, were communicated to the Comintern. A good example of this is a hefty pamphlet, *Our Struggle for Socialist Unity and a United Front in the Punjab*,[124] authored by Sohan Singh Josh and his allies in 1936/37. Published in Urdu and meant primarily for a local audience, the pamphlet was nevertheless also written with the Comintern in mind and in response to an earlier Kirti pamphlet, *Our Struggle against Factionalism in the Punjab Congress and the Role of Different Parties and Individuals in this Struggle.*[125] In this war of pamphlets, competing groups tried to pass themselves off as the 'true' communists, both to the Comintern and their local audiences.

Beyond appealing to their constituencies and currying favour with the Comintern, these debates were unavoidable for another reason: ideas mattered. Especially ideas connected to revolutionary transformations and utopias. In the 1930s, as international communism under Stalinism became more rigid and more fixed, the process of creating a socialist utopia could ill afford any deviances or ideological heterogeneity. Revolution may have been around the corner, but the route to it was fixed. It also required a certain, disciplined, one-dimensional, and ethical subject. And the urgency of forcing through a socialist utopia and the belief in its inevitability meant that, paradoxically, factionalism was a luxury the Left could afford. More than a potentially dishevelled, undisciplined, and internally fractious 'united front', what mattered more was the 'correctness' of ideas and political action.

Factionalism, then, was intimately tied to the politics of utopia. One result of that was that the Punjab, as elsewhere in India, had a dizzying array of leftist parties up until independence and beyond. The more noteworthy of these were the Punjab Congress Socialist Party (CSP), the Punjab Kisan Sabha/Committee (PKC), the Kirti network, and the

[123] Comintern Archives (CA), Library of Congress (LOC), F. 495, Inv. 16, File 50 ff. 168–173.

[124] CA/ F. 495, Inv. 16, File 57a (compiled by) L.A. Kirijevstaja, 'Papers by Ram Kishen on Kirti', Sohan Singh Josh, Fazl Ilahi Qurban et al., *Punjab May Socialist Ittehad aur Muttahidda Mahaz kay liye Hamari Jidd o Jehad* (F.D. Mansur Printers), F.495, Inv. 16, File 57a ff., pp. 256–273.

[125] F. 595, Inv. 16, File 34, Ram Kishen and Tika Ram Sukhan, *Punjab Congress may firqa-parasti kay khilaaf hamari jido-jehad aur is jido-jehad may mukhtalif partioun o afraad ka kirdar*, ff. 172–179.

provincial Communist Party. Each was established in response to political developments nationally and internationally. The provincial CSP, for example, was formed soon after the founding of its parent All India party in 1934. That was also the year when the Kirti Kisan Sabha was formally banned by the provincial government. The socialist party's emergence, though, had been a response to what its founders viewed as the intolerably rigid and sectarian character of Indian and international communism. In the Punjab, the party was primarily constituted of former members of the defunct NJBS and communists following the Popular Front policy of the Comintern.[126] Similarly, the PKC was the provisional branch of the All India Kisan Committee (AIKC), formed in 1936. Comprised of various factions, the Punjab Kisan Sabha was led by Kirti activists and socialists until the mid-1940s, which is when the much-vaunted unity deal between the Kirtis and communist groups came to pass.

This Time Is Ours

Notwithstanding its confounding nature, leftist factionalism in British Punjab gave an insight into a thriving socialist and communist movement. This was remarkable for a province that was the bulwark for the Raj and the British Empire at large. Annexed in 1849 from the remnants of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's once-powerful kingdom, the Punjab was distinctive for its despotic, and paternalistic, style of administration. The provincial administration, otherwise also known as the 'Punjab School', prided itself on its ostensibly efficient governance, which ensured order and stability in return for state patronage to certain groups crucial to the maintenance of Empire.[127] Central in this equation were the 'martial races' of the Punjab. Inhabiting the central and northwestern regions of the province, these groups by the First World War accounted for more than half of military recruits to the British Indian Army. No

[126] Explained in greater detail in Chapter 6.

[127] For the best example of this outlook, see the memoirs of F.L. Brayne, *Better Villages*, 3rd edn (Oxford University Press, 1946), and the memoirs of Sir Michael O'Dwyer, *India As I Knew It, 1885–1925*, 2nd edn (Constable, 1925). For an insight into the internal workings of the Punjab administration, see P.H.M. van den Dungen, *The Punjab Tradition: Influence and Authority in Nineteenth-Century India* (Allen & Unwin, 1972); Andrew J. Major, *Return to Empire: Punjab under the Sikhs and British in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Sterling Publishers, 1996); and Clive Dewey, *The Mind of the Indian Civil Service* (Oxford University Press, 1996). For an account of the most famous of all Punjabi administrators, who were in many ways the founders of the 'Punjab Tradition', see Harold Lee, *Brothers in the Raj: The Lives of John and Henry Lawrence* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

other province or region in British India came close to matching this ratio.[128] The 'Sword Arm of the Empire' was a highly militarized and tightly governed province.

Despite this, a thriving leftist movement found ground in the Punjab, ironically in the very same districts that were crucial to military recruitment. While this apparent paradox will become clearer in the following chapter, for now it is important to note that the Punjabi leftist movement, and the Kirti Kisan Sabha in particular, provides a useful example of how Communist Internationalism was provincialized in British India. This is where a close scrutiny of regional and local politics is instructive. Viewed from the ground up, it becomes clear how communism was woven in through the socio-political landscape of the Punjab. More strikingly, it also shows how the politics of internationalism went through the seemingly local. In many ways, this could only have been possible in a world in which revolutionaries viewed themselves as part of a global movement against imperialism and capitalism. Even when operating in specific sites and addressing localized issues, nothing less than the world itself was at stake. Also at work was a utopian impulse that revolutionaries and communists elsewhere in India or the world would have instinctively recognized. From its inception as a party standing in solidarity with the oppressed of the world to the way in which it conducted its politics, the Kirti Sabha and its successors were driven by a deep faith in a revolution that was always around the corner. This was a faith that continually sought, in Oscar Wilde's words, to land at the destination called Utopia. This conviction and drive was reflected in virtually every aspect of Kirti politics, from the content of its publications and the way its members organized their lives, to even the way they fought each other on ideological and political grounds. Few philosophers have expressed this better than Reinhart Koselleck, who speaks of the politics of expectation, a politics that is embodied and inhabited instead of merely expressed. Expectation, Koselleck notes,

> Also takes place in the today. It is the future made present. It directs itself to the not-yet, to the non-experienced, to that which is to be revealed. Hope and fear, wishes and desires, cares and rational analysis, receptive display and curiosity: all enter into expectation and constitute it.[129]

[128] Tai Yong Tan, *The Garrison State: The Military, Government and Society in Colonial Punjab 1849–1947* (Sage, 2005), pp. 17–18. Also see David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860–1940* (Macmillan, 1994), and Gajendra Singh, *Between Self and Sepoy: The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars* (Bloomsbury, 2014) in particular, chapter 1.

[129] Koselleck, *Futures Past*, p. 259.

To elaborate this thought further, the politics of expectation sought not only to create a transformed social and political system, it also desired a utopian subject, a revolutionary subject. For revolutionaries, the creation of this subject was the precursor, and indeed the requirement, for ushering in that promised transformation. This is also why the body was the site of utopian politics. Bodies had to be disciplined, desires had to be crushed, sacrifices had to be made, and subjectivities had to be cultivated for a new world to come into being. In the stories revolutionaries told about themselves, this was a small price to pay. This, after all, was a Time pregnant with possibilities. This was, in other words, *their* Time. And this was a time that stood in marked contrast with colonial time, in which the colonized were never meant to craft their destiny for themselves. This was also a Time that was woven in through the social, cultural, and political resources of their present. Today, in our present, not only is that past distant from us, it is also removed from us through its imaginative possibilities. Indeed, one of the ways in which those imaginative possibilities were actualized was in the fusion of ostensibly contradictory political ideals. Today, that history of fluidity and acculturation is all too forgotten in the ongoing memorialization of these pasts. There is a politics embedded in that memorialization too, and it is to the question of historical erasure that this account now turns.

5 Entangled Histories

My memory keeps getting in the way of your history.[1]
Agha Shahid Ali, 'Farewell'

Halfway between Amritsar and Jalandhar on the Grand Trunk Road lies the small and nondescript town of Rayya. At first glance, there is nothing striking about Rayya – nothing, that is, except for the spacious grounds of a school and a college for women, both named after '*shaheed*' Darshan Singh 'Pheruman'. Located a mere three kilometres from the village of Pheruman, the college and school were founded in 1974 and 1981 respectively to mark 'the great sacrifice' made by the *shaheed* 'for the cause of maintaining the sanctity of Sikh Ardas'. Today, the school has impressive facilities and a student body of 3500. It also has a Facebook page. With the stated mission of creating a 'living memory of the unique Sikh', the school's website remembers the 'apostle of sacrifice' thus.

S Darshan Singh Pheruman was born on 1st August 1886, at Pheruman in district Amritsar. His mother's name was Smt. Raj Kaur and Father's name was S Chanda Singh. He passed his matriculation from Doaba Khalsa School Jalandhar. The massacre of Jallianwala Bagh on 13th April 1919 changed his life. He spent many years of his life in jails of Multan and Nabha for freedom of country.

In 1926, he went to Malaya. There he observed five days hunger strike for keeping Sikh traditions alive. He participated actively in the freedom struggle. After Independence he participated in the struggle of Akali Dal for reorganizing Punjab State on the basis of Language.

On 15th August 1969, he observed fast unto death after performing *Ardas* to the Almighty God. In the morning of 27th October 1969, he established a unique example of his martyrdom after the hunger strike of 74 days giving proof of his self-reliance and strong determination.[2]

[1] Agha Shahid Ali, 'Farewell', in *The Country without a Post Office: Poems 1991–1995* (Ravi Dayal, 2000).
[2] Shaheed Darshan Singh Pheruman Public School (Rayya), 'History', www.sdsppschool.com/home/history.

A longer account on Pheruman's life is given in the online *Sikh Encyclopaedia*. Introduced as a 'political leader and a martyr', the excerpt more or less mirrors the account given of Pheruman's early life on the school's website. Here, the year of his birth is given as 1885. There are, however, other substantive differences. Pheruman, we are told, enlisted as a *sepoy* in the Indian army in 1912. He resigned from service after two years and was doing well as a contractor when a 'taunt' from his deeply religious mother made him give up his business and join the growing gurdwara reform movement, better known as the Akali Movement. Absent in this retelling is the life-changing impact of Jallianwala Bagh. Instead, Pheruman's involvement in the Akali movement is highlighted, something that hardly merits a mention on the school's website. Both accounts mention the services he rendered during the nationalist movement, his subsequent involvement in East Punjabi politics following independence, and the ultimate price he paid for it. Both also mention his sojourn in Malaya and his first hunger strike in defence of Sikh traditions (apparently, he was forbidden from wearing the *kachha*, one of the five articles of 'Khalsa discipline'). They only differ in the details: the *Encyclopaedia* mentions that he went on hunger strike for twenty-one days. Presumably, five days were not impressive enough.[3]

Similar accounts emerge in other volumes dedicated to Sikh political figures and martyrs. He is remembered as one of the 'great martyrs of [the] Sikh faith'.[4] On this, at least, there appears to be a consensus. Pheruman's life, it seems, was single-mindedly devoted to the defence of Sikh traditions, Punjabi causes and, as an aside, the struggle to liberate India from British rule. There is little to indicate that Pheruman was anything other a passionate defender of Sikh rights. That, at any rate, is how he has been memorialized.

Apparitions in the Archives

There is, however, another Pheruman that comes to life in an earlier and more contemporaneous account. In this account, Pheruman emerges as a Ghadarite/Kirti 'agitator'. One indication of his importance as a Ghadarite/Kirti worker is his voluminous entry in the 'Ghadar Directory' of 1934. Compiled under the supervision of H. Williamson, Director of the Intelligence Bureau, the Directory superseded the earlier Ghadar Directory, issued in 1917, and contained a comprehensive list

[3] *The Sikh Encyclopedia*, www.thesikhencyclopedia.com/sikh-political-figures/darshan-singh-pheruman.

[4] 'Darshan Singh Pheruman: A Unique Martyr', in Ranjit Singh (ed.), *Sikh Achievers* (Hemkunt Publishers, 2008), p. 37.

of those who had 'taken part in the Ghadar movement in America, Europe, Africa and Afghanistan as well as in India'. The IB and CID issued such 'directories' and lists, usually labelled as 'Who's who', from time to time on 'subversive' political movements. Their stated purpose was to remind concerned officials of the seriousness of the threat posed by such movements, and to supply them with concise biographical sketches of the individuals involved. In that spirit, the purpose of the Ghadar Directory of 1934 was to emphasize the 'necessity for vigilance on the part of all officers of the British Crown'. It was also intended to 'show Consular officers in different parts of the world why the authorities in India have continuously to make demands on their time in connection with the comings and goings of persons believed to be members of that very disloyal, but equally almost equally stupid, organization, the Ghadar Party'.[5]

This unflattering portrayal aside, the government of India did take the Ghadr Party seriously. Its contacts with the Comintern, together with its apparently global reach in regions with sizeable Indian communities, were viewed with great concern by the colonial authorities. That Pheruman was included in the directory was not surprising. As outlined in the previous chapters, the Ghadar 'party', especially in its second phase, was more of a loose network of individuals with shared political leanings. If anything, there is not much in the colonial sources to indicate that Pheruman was a 'member' of the 'party', nor, in fact, is there anything to indicate that he was in direct contact with Ghadar operatives in North America. And yet, if his voluminous entry is anything to go by, his revolutionary activities were viewed as a credible threat by the authorities. His entry is worth quoting in some detail.

> Darshan Singh, son of Chanda Singh, of Pheruman, P.S. Beas, District Amritsar. He first came to notice in July 1923 when he took an active part in the activities of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). Subsequently acted as Jathedar of one of the Shahidi Jathas … and was convicted and sentenced to 6 months RI and a fine of Rs. 100. Was nominated to the Sikh Central Board … in 1926 and … was appointed a member of the Working Committee of the Shiromani Akali Dal. In 1927 he declared himself in favour of a communist regime in India and at the Labor Conference organized by the Kirti group during the session of the Central Sikh League and … delivered a seditious speech stressing the fact that India's liberation lay in the awakening of the masses. Was reported … to have confined his attention solely to Kirti propaganda. Participated

[5] IOR/V/27/262/6, 'The Ghadr Directory: Containing the names of persons who have taken in the Ghadr movement in America, Europe, Africa and Afghanistan as well as in India', compiled by Intelligence Bureau, Home Department, Government of India (New Delhi, 1934), p. iii.

in the proceedings of the Punjabi Political Conference held at Amritsar in April 1928 at which the resolution favoring complete independence for India was passed. Throughout 1928 he was active in the promotion of the interests of the Kirti Party, and interested himself in the formation of a 'Peasants' and Workers' Party'. In view of his past record his application for a passport to Afghanistan to attend the Third Pan Asiatic Conference was refused. Visited the Federated Malay States in July 1928 in the company of Samand Singh of village Raya Kalan, district Amritsar (who preached sedition during the Great War) to ascertain the names of Indians in the Malay States who were responsible for the proscription of the 'Kirti' and collect funds for the Naujawan Bharat Sabha. Was deported from Peral (FMS) on account of his objectionable activities there and arrived in India on 3rd October, and arrangements were made not to accord him any passport facilities in future … Was elected General Secretary of the District Congress Committee, Amritsar, in … 1929. In 1930 fomented agitation against the resettlement of the Amritsar district and threatened non-payment of taxes and the creation of another 'Bardoli' in the Punjab if the demands of the Zamindars were not conceded. Was arrested at Tarn Tarn in May 1930 … for active participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement. Took part in the Sisganj Gurdwara agitation and was elected General Secretary of the Central Sikh League … Was sentenced … to one year's imprisonment under section 124 A IPC and was released in March 1931 under the Gandhi Irwin Pact. Attended the 3rd All India Workers and Peasants Conference held at Karachi in March 1931. Was arrested and convicted under section 108 CPC in August 1931. On his return to Amritsar after his release on 28th August 1932, he was served with an order of restraint under the Special Powers Ordinance on 1932. Attended the Sikh Political Conference at Lyallpur in October 1932 and in December of that year was appointed provisional Secretary of the Mazdoor Kisan Sabha. Was again served with a restraint order under Section 3 of the Punjab CLA Act of 1932 in January 1933. He is a dangerous agitator, and a prominent Akali and Kirti Kisan worker. Owns landed property.

Description: Age about 43 years; wheat complexion; stout build; round face.[6]

To point out the obvious, the Pheruman emerging in this account is far removed, and far messier, than the Pheruman memorialized today. Even when reporting on similar events, colonial and contemporary accounts depart quite significantly in their interpretations of them. Thus, in the Ghadar Directory, an entirely different meaning and purpose is accorded to Pheruman's sojourn in Malaya. There is no mention of his famed hunger strike, nor do we have any indication of him defending 'Sikh traditions'. Instead, his travel to Malaya is mentioned only with respect to his 'seditious' (read: revolutionary) activism. More significantly, though, the Pheruman emerging in the Ghadar Directory is far more difficult, if not impossible, to pin down in terms of his political and ideological affiliations. In the decade covered by his entry when 'he first

[6] Ibid., pp. 62–63.

came to notice', he was a member of the Shiromani Akali Dal, the Indian National Congress, the Kirti Kisan Party, the Central Sikh League, and affiliated with various networks and platforms such as the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), the Naujawan Bharat Sabha, the Mazdoor Kisan Sabha, the Sikh Central Board, and others. Meanwhile, he was involved in all kinds of agitations from Sikh politics and socio-religious reform to workers' and peasants' movements and the struggle against British imperialism. From this laundry list of sorts, it seems as if Darshan Singh Pheruman dabbled with almost every political movement in the Punjab.

How this worked together is a story that tells us much about the character of the interwar period, for Pheruman was among many such activists who seemed to straddle varied, ostensibly distinct, and occasionally opposed political movements. That the intermeshed and entangled nature of his politics has been forgotten today does not come as much of a surprise. His memorialization as a martyr for the Sikh community aside, Pheruman's tenuous relationship with revolutionary politics has also been forgotten in later accounts penned by Punjabi leftists and revolutionaries. Nor have historians fared any better. There is little, if any, recognition of the transitory, entangled, and contingent associations practised by political activists. Instead, the overarching emphasis seems to be on retrospectively typecasting these actors into neat political and ideological silos, which only serves to reduce their complex trajectories and history.

That is not to suggest, however, that the colonial archive is the only repository where the full complexity of such engagements can be uncovered. Indeed, colonial reporting came with its silences and contradictions too, along with the choices made by those reporting on these figures. There is no apparent reason, for instance, why Pheruman occupied such a prominent position in the Ghadar Directory. He could have been listed as an affiliate of other movements and organizations, and indeed, in other intelligence accounts, he was. The fact that he was listed as a Ghadarite and a Kirti, however, showed just how nebulous both categories were. The same could be said of revolutionary politics and communism more generally. At a moment in which ideological and political affiliations were anything but fixed, activists like Pheruman could easily be viewed as dangerous agitators and revolutionaries. Added to this was the perceived threat posed by 'communism' in India. Likened to a 'virus' that could spread uncontrollably if left unchecked, colonial intelligence services were all too quick to include anyone remotely suspected of 'communist' or 'revolutionary' sympathies into their lists of 'dangerous agitators'.

Towards the end of this passage, the narrative narrows to the point where Pheruman is definitively identified as 'a dangerous agitator, and a

prominent Akali and Kirti Kisan worker'. The alliance of an organization committed to faith and community with one committed to a 'workers and peasants' revolution would have been strange indeed had Pheruman been the only one tied to both. And yet, he was one among many Akalis who were tied to the Kirti Kisan Party and other leftist organizations. Indeed, there were many in the KKP who first cut their political teeth in the Akali Movement. Sohan Singh Josh is one prominent example. Josh, however, belonged to a group who made a more radical transition to the leftist spectrum of politics, severing in the process their linkages to the Akali Party and Sikh communitarian politics in general. For others, though, there was little, if any, contradiction between 'leftist' and 'Sikh' politics.

Mentioning the two as distinct categories, however, runs the risk of neglecting the many overlaps between them. Produced by the archive, reproduced by the historian, and memorialized in separate histories, there is little recognition today that the two were deeply intertwined at one point. That, at any rate, is how Pheruman is commemorated as well. Mentioning the two as distinct also poses definitional problems. The first relates to the broad classification of 'Sikh politics'. In part, this is a trap laid by the colonial archive. Police reporting in the 1920s, for instance, regularly grouped all forms of political mobilization involving 'Sikhs' or responding to 'Sikh' concerns as 'Sikh politics'. That predictably ignored the thornier question of how 'Sikhs' were to be defined. Later, starting from the late 1920s and 1930s, a distinction was made in police reporting between 'Sikh' and 'communist' or 'socialist' politics. 'Labour' was assigned a separate section. And yet there were slippages in these reports too. Frequently, the same individuals, organizations, and events were reported in both 'Sikh' and 'communist' politics. Clearly, this fluidity was difficult to categorize, even for a bureaucracy accustomed to viewing the socio-political landscape in neat, divisible categories. In turn, this difficulty pointed to the rather obvious fact that the world of 'Sikh' politics encompassed a variety of political and ideological orientations circulating at any given period. To further complicate matters, ostensibly incompatible political allegiances often comfortably coexisted with each other. Thus, for certain periods, and in particular the early interwar era, it becomes quite difficult to distinguish between 'Sikh' and 'leftist' politics. In other periods, especially towards the end of the interwar era, distinctions between the two became more pronounced. However, even in times of mutual acrimony and implacable hostility, there were slippages and overlaps between the two. In short, then, the history of the Left in Punjab is also a history of Sikh politics in general.

Genealogies, Geographies

It is in the interstices of these entangled histories that Darshan Singh Pheruman can best be located. His political trajectory belongs to a longer history and genealogy of radicalism that can partly be traced back to the emergence of Sikh communitarian politics in Punjab. With roots going back to the late nineteenth century, the Sikh political sphere encompassed a variety of organizations ranging from socio-religious movements to political groups, all claiming to safeguard Sikh interests. The watershed moment in Sikh politics came with the Akali[7] movement, which from 1920 to 1925 posed the most serious challenge to the authority of the provincial government since the annexation of Punjab in 1849. While the movement was centred on the issue of gurdwara control, it quickly morphed into a radical movement against the Raj and its loyalists.[8]

Leading the charge were two organizations. Both emerged from the movement and both would profoundly shape Sikh politics in the coming decades. The first, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), was formed in 1920 with the explicit purpose of bringing all Sikh religious spaces, including their vast estates and significant incomes, under Panthic control and management.[9] Given its all-encompassing remit and wide-ranging powers – afforded legal sanction by the government in order to placate Sikh opinion – the SGPC was often the site of frequent political jousts between various organizations, which included the Punjab Left. After all, control of the SGPC also provided victorious factions an excellent opportunity to influence the course of Sikh politics.

The second organization, the Shiromani Akali Dal, also known as the Akali Party or the Akali Dal, was founded by the SGPC shortly after its creation in 1920. Though the Shiromani Akali Dal was closely tied with the SGPC in its formative phase as well at various other periods, it exercised a degree of autonomy and assertiveness over key political issues. Initially, the Dal was founded as an umbrella organization with the purpose of unifying and coordinating the activities of the numerous

[7] Signifying one who is eternal and immortal. Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Movement* (Macmillan, 1978), p. 7.

[8] For a concise overview of the movement, see Tai Yong Tan, 'Assuaging the Sikhs: Government Responses to the Akali Movement, 1920–1925', *Modern Asian Studies* 29, 3 (July 1995), 660–663. For a more extended treatment, see Mohinder Singh and Kailash C. Gulati, *The Akalis, Past and Present* (Ashajanak Publications, 1974) and Raghbir Singh, *Akali Movement* (Omsons Publishers, 1997).

[9] M. Singh, *The Akali Movement*, p. 18.

Akali *jathas* operating throughout the province to forcibly retake gurdwaras from their corrupt *mahants* (priests).[10]

Shortly after its inception, the Akali movement dovetailed its demand for Panthic control over gurdwaras with a radical and uncompromising brand of anti-colonial politics. In doing so, it also fed off the ongoing Khilafat and non-cooperation movements and the widespread anger in the wake of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. Despite several deadly incidents, the movement was, for the most part, non-violent, with thousands of its volunteers courting arrest and submitting themselves to state persecution.

Of greater concern to the authorities was the spread of disaffection in districts vital for the sustenance of the British Indian Army and, by extension, the Empire. Militant groups further exacerbated an already tense situation. A few highly organized bodies like the Akal Fauj operated along military lines and enjoyed the backing of more 'extreme' elements in the broader movement. In a region with large numbers of well-trained serving and demobilized soldiers, a militant uprising could pose a grave threat to the state.[11] While the Akal Fauj was still tied to the SGPC, other 'terrorist' outfits operated autonomously. The most serious of these was the Babbar Akali *jatha*, formed in 1922 by Akali radicals disgruntled by non-violent tactics. Their form of direct action included assassinations of government officials and state loyalists.[12] Like the Akali movement at large, this group also tapped into diasporic revolutionary networks for personnel as well as funding. Here too the Ghadar Party made its presence felt, with many of its members allegedly joining the Babbar Akalis along with former soldiers radicalized by the Akali movement.[13] Seeking to foment revolution, the Babbar Akali gang committed a series of 'brutal outrages', spread revolutionary propaganda and assassinated several government loyalists. While the gang was deftly eliminated by the state with most of its members either killed

[10] These *jathas* or bands of Sikh volunteers called themselves Akalis, ostensibly after a sixteenth-century group of warrior ascetics. Akali *jathas* varied in number from a few dozen to hundreds of members, and, initially, usually functioned within a certain locality or district from which volunteers were drawn. Each *jatha* was headed by a jathedar, in charge of all activities within his vicinity. Tai Yong Tan, 'Assuaging the Sikhs', p. 665 and M. Singh, *The Akali Movement*, p. 93.

[11] M. Singh, *The Akali Movement*, p. 96.

[12] Report on the Police Administration in the Punjab (RPAP) 1922, Proceedings of the Governor of the Punjab in Council in the Home (Police) Department, No. 3040-S, 28 August 1923, p. 17.

[13] RPAP 1921, No. 283-S, from: L.L. Tomkins, Inspector-General of Police, Punjab to the Home Secretary to Government, Punjab, Simla, 1 July 1921, p. 19. Also see M. Singh, *The Akali Movement*, pp. 114–115.

or arrested,[14] the Babbar Akalis nevertheless nudged the Akali movement towards a more radical position. The consequence, as a police report noted with dismay, was that in the districts most affected by the Akali movement, there was a 'noticeable weakening of the loyalty of the Sikh peasantry', and, of greater concern, a 'certain number of retired soldiers'.[15]

There were, of course, good reasons to be concerned. 'Sikhs', and especially Jat Sikhs, as a monolithic entity in the colonial imagination, were one of the cornerstones of imperial stability in the Punjab. They also happened to dominate certain districts in central and eastern Punjab; districts crucial to military recruitment. And yet, the very same districts were affected by the ill-fated Ghadar rebellion of 1914. As an intelligence report from 1916 indicated, 'the head-quarters of the [Ghadar] conspiracy was established in the Manjha, Malwa, and Doaba tracts', though 'recruits were drawn to the ranks of the terrorists from districts as far afield as Rawalpindi, Jhelum and from other Provinces'.[16] Predictably, many of these districts were also deeply imbricated in migratory networks, including those to North America. During the rebellion, most returning revolutionaries chose to return to their home districts. Again, most were Sikh Jats. Unlike the Akali agitation, though, the Ghadar 'rebellion' attracted far greater local opposition than active sympathy and support.

By the time the Akali movement reached its peak, these districts were on the verge of open rebellion. Specifically, per data tabulated in 1922, the districts of Lyallpur, Amritsar, Jullundur, Lahore, Sheikhupura, Hoshiarpur, and Ludhiana supplied the bulk of Akali recruits. Northwestern districts of Rawalpindi and Jhelum also provided a sizeable number of recruits. Two-thirds of recruits were classified as Sikh Jats.[17] Within this matrix, certain localities earned an iconic status for their resistance against the colonial state. To give but two examples, Tarn Taran and Guru-ka-Bagh emerged as epicentres of protest and rebellion. Both had also been significant sites for the failed Ghadar rebellion,[18] and

[14] RPAP 1923, No. 340-S, from: L.L. Tomkins, Inspector-General of Police, Punjab to the Home Secretary to Government, Punjab, Simla, 23 June 1924, pp. 20–21.
[15] RPAP 1924, No. 212-S, from: G.A. Cocks, Inspector-General of Police, Punjab to the Home Secretary to Government, Punjab, Simla, 15 June 1925, p. 12.
[16] RPAP, 1915, Proceedings of His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab in the Home (Police) Department, No. 291 – Police-2, 15 September 1916, p. 2.
[17] M. Singh, *The Akali Movement*, pp. 97–101 and tabulated information on pp. 100–101. This table, however, does not contain information on Sikh states, southwestern and southeastern Punjab.
[18] By way of an example, RPAP 1915. 'No. 977-3, From: Lieutenant-Colonel H.T. Dennys, Inspector-General of Police, Punjab to the Additional Secretary to Government, Punjab, Simla, 30th June 1916', pp. 6–7.

both would continue to be crucial sites for Akali and leftist politics. Viewed this way, there was a deep relationship between communities, migratory movements, geographies, genealogies of resistance, and indeed their converse: service to the Empire. Political radicalism in the Punjab, as elsewhere, was more than simply being a function of powerful ideas. It was also deeply embedded in specific sites, communities, and material conditions.

Entanglements

This backdrop makes it easier to situate political radicalism in the Punjab. It also clarifies how the Akali movement provided a stepping stone for activists like Darshan Singh Pheruman into revolutionary politics. Alongside Ghadar, leftist activists obtained their political education in the Akali movement. As the previous chapter briefly described, the career of Sohan Singh Josh offers yet another example of this fairly typical trajectory. As with Darshan Singh, his account also comes from the Ghadar Directory.

> Sohan Singh Josh, son of Lal Singh, Jat of Chetanpura, P.S Ajnala, District Amritsar … Took a prominent part in the Akali movement and was given the sobriquet of 'Josh' (fiery) on account of his violent speeches at Akali Diwans. In 1921 he helped to foment anti Government agitation among the Sikhs over the question of the possession of the keys of the Golden Temple, Amritsar and in 1922 identified himself prominently with the agitation arising out of the Guru-ka-Bagh *morcha*. Was the secretary of the Akali Dal. Became a member of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. Was arrested in October 1923 in the Akali leaders Case. While still under trial he was elected a member of the Shiromani Akali Dal. Was released in September 1926 when the case against the Akali leaders was dropped. Developed communistic ideas and on Santokh Singh's (of village Dodher, district Amritsar) death took up on the management of the 'Kirti' paper with Bhag Singh Canadian.[19]

It is striking how Josh's colonial biography is silent on his earlier life and, in particular, his career in the Censor's Office in Bombay where he was charged with censoring letters. Nor does it refer to his all-too-brief service in the military. Both are mentioned in Josh's autobiography.[20] Both also stand in stark contrast to Josh's later life as an uncompromising adversary of the British Raj. For colonial intelligence, questions of previous occupations were of little or no consequence. Nor were questions of motivation or intent of any relevance. What mattered was the coming of political age, when the individuals in question were first 'noticed' for

[19] The Ghadr Directory, pp. 270–271. [20] Josh, *My Tryst with Secularism*, chapter 2.

their subversive activities. Presented as an event, as a spontaneous happening with no prior history ('developed communistic ideas'), there is little indication that there could be a connection between the Akali movement, his imprisonment, and his leftist inclinations.

This is where Josh's account becomes instructive. In his recollection, the Akali movement proved to be watershed moment in his life. His account is in keeping with the tenor of autobiographical works authored by the Left. It is a story of transformative change, of sudden rupture, of a coming of age, of key events and chance encounters that overturned years of accreted habit and ossified thought. For Josh, one transformative encounter was with the daily *Akali*, first published in May 1920. For someone used to reading religious weeklies, the *Akali* 'changed [his] entire outlook'. Its 'rousing anti-British government editorials, poems and articles instilled new life … in the nationally dried up bones of the Sikh community'.[21]

The invocation of a 'new life', of rebirths, of awakenings and new beginnings from an unconscious and comatose state akin to a living death is a familiar feature of revolutionary narratives. Imbued with a new life, the young Sohan Singh joined the Akali movement. Defying his mother and wife, he quit his job and dedicated himself to the *panth*. In a short period, he had climbed the ranks of the movement and participated in a number of notable agitations. That much is also evident from government reports. His second stint in prison as part of the Akali Leaders' Case marked another transformative event in Josh's memory, so transformative that he dedicated an entire chapter to it in his autobiography. Titled 'Book That Changed My Life', the chapter is a paean to *Liberty and the Great Libertarians*, edited by Charles T. Sprading. Posted by a friend from his village, who was then studying in UC Berkeley and editing the *Ghadar*, the book was an anthology of quotes from the 'great radicals and revolutionaries of their times'. As Josh recalled,

> [the book] affected my future course of life and activities. I was no longer the young man that I was before being exposed to this book as it began the process of transforming my life. It literally opened up new vistas before my mind.[22]

Commenting on how the 'Age of Reason' had dawned on him, Josh credited the book for his increasing distrust of orthodoxy, 'dogma', and 'blind faith', and his aversion to what he called the 'bane of fatalism' of the 'Indian mind'.[23]

To paraphrase his entry in the Ghadar Directory, this was how Josh 'developed communistic ideas'. His political education in the Akali

[21] Ibid., p. 19. [22] Ibid., p. 69. [23] Ibid., chapters 7 and 10.

movement and his public avowal of radical ideas and statements before the court brought him to the attention of Bhai Santokh Singh, editor of the monthly *Kirti*. What followed has been covered in the previous chapter. More importantly, though, his entry in the Ghadar Directory neatly encapsulates a specific trajectory to leftist politics. For many who were ideologically flexible and yet uncompromisingly anti-imperialist, 'communism' provided a means through which they could carry on their radical brand of politics long after the Akali movement had successfully ended. For some, 'communism' was an inspiring set of ideals that could provide further sustenance to their communitarian and/or anti-colonial agenda. For others, it was a comprehensive project of social, economic, and political change. Understood this way, communism was far from a 'foreign import' as alleged by its detractors. Instead, it was distinctly compatible with a range of meanings and socio-political visions that emerged from a localized context of anti-colonial struggle.

Nowhere is this better illustrated than the manifold ways in which faith and community were woven in with communism. To begin with the obvious, religious symbolism – and specifically religious injunctions relating to martyrdom, egalitarianism, and social justice – was part and parcel of political language. Invoking religion, though, was not merely a question of acquiring political legitimacy. Instead, for many, there was no contradiction between their religious beliefs and communist ideals. And how could it have been otherwise? Religion was central to the way many navigated the world. It also provided a political vocabulary to those who sought to transform the world, especially those who cut their political teeth in a socio-religious movement.

There are other examples one can invoke here. The second chapter pointed out how Maulvi Barkatullah, for example, wrote of communism as a 'divine cry'.[24] In a global *zeitgeist*, then, where communism had acquired an iconic status in which it worked more as polemic, as a set of ideals, and as an inspiration rather than a rigid and inflexible set of philosophical and political beliefs, it was quite usual for communism or 'bolshevism' to be invoked in disparate settings for disparate intents and purposes. In the same vein, leaders of the Akali movement regularly referred to Russian revolutionary ideals when addressing explicitly communitarian and religious concerns. One Mota Singh, for instance, made this connection explicit at an Akali conference. 'Communism', he was reported to have said, 'was nothing new … as it had been started by Guru

[24] Also quoted in S.S. Josh, *My Meetings with Bhagat Singh and on Other Early Revolutionaries* (Communist Party of India, 1976), p. 40.

Nanak Dev'. Indeed, 'the principles of the Sikh religion were the protection of the poor and the destruction of tyrants and this was nothing but communism.'[25] In other instances, religious and cultural fairs such as *Baisakhi* and *Puranmashi* became platforms where communist ideals were invoked.[26] While not unusual in a political culture where religious fairs were also sites for all varieties of political activism, the interplay between the two also signified the extent to which communism had become embedded in local spaces.

But this was also a function of a specific period in which political affiliations and ideological orientations were in a state of relative flux. As alluded to in previous chapters, the 1920s and the early 1930s were striking for their flexible political arenas, which offered numerous possibilities for diverse political strands to collaborate and overlap with each other. With a few notable exceptions, this flexibility was even more apparent between the Left and Sikh communitarianism. This much is evident from the report on Darshan Singh Pheruman. It is also evident from the reports on numerous political activists. Thus, insofar as the Akali and Kirti Kisan movements were concerned, there was little to differentiate the two in this period. Additionally, the Kirti Kisan and other leftist organizations such as the NJBS also collaborated frequently with other Sikh parties such as the Central Sikh League. And so, while there were certainly irreconcilable differences between the Left and Sikh communitarianism, there were far greater overlaps and points of convergence. Indeed, the difficulty in separating the two is also reflected in colonial reporting, as the same events and individuals were reported on interchangeably under the headings of either 'Sikh Affairs' or 'Communism/Revolutionary'.

Beyond simply an ideational level, these overlaps were evident in the political choices made by individuals and the movements they participated in. This period was remarkable for its flexibility of party and organizational affiliations. Political activists regularly retained multiple memberships and moved from one organization with relative ease. This was especially the case between the Akali and Kirti Kisan parties. A colourful character, Kishen Singh 'Bomb', for instance, described as 'luminary of the Kirti Kisan Sabha' by the police, was at the same time a *jathedar* of the Akali Dal at Guru-ka-Bagh.[27] What was true of Kishen Singh 'Bomb' was true of others as well. Far from being an exception, then, dual, or multiple, party affiliations were actually the

[25] PPSAI 1929, Simla-E, 29 June, No. 26, p. 334.
[26] As one of many examples, PPSAI 1932, Lahore, 19 November, No. 46, p. 651.
[27] PPSAI 1931, Lahore, 12 December, No. 48, p. 689.

norm among the rank and file of these and other movements. These affiliations were in addition to their membership of the Indian National Congress, which functioned as a supra-body incorporating nearly all shades of political opinion in the Punjab. This also meant that political platforms and spaces were jointly held and used by supposedly distinct political parties. Kirti Kisan meetings, for instance, were frequently held in Akali Dal offices while ostensibly non-political spaces such as gurdwaras were also utilized for mutual party consultations.[28] Similarly, Kirti workers were a regular fixture at *diwans*, conferences, and public meetings organized by the Akalis or Central Sikh League and vice versa.[29] This was equally true for political campaigns. In the Daska *morcha* (agitation) of 1931, for instance, which concerned a communal dispute between Hindus and Sikhs over the ownership of a gurdwara, Kirti activists actively participated in protests organized by the Akali Dal. In doing so, they also introduced their socio-economic demands.[30] The cooperation between the two was particularly evident in the agitation against Sikh princely states. In 1928, following the All India States People's Conference the year before, the *Punjab Riyasti Praja Mandal*[31] was founded by Akali activists. Widely derided for their widespread oppression and maladministration, princely states were frequently the target of radical and nationalist opinion. The *Mandal* was thus founded by Akalis with a variety of sweeping objectives ranging from administrative to agrarian reforms. True to form, the *Mandal* also included Kirtis. Their intervention was important in agrarian disputes in the states of Patiala, Malerkotla, Nabha, and Kalsia, among others.[32] That being said, political activism in princely states frequently posed different challenges when compared to British-administered territories.[33]

[28] PPSAI 1932, Simla-E, 17 September, No. 38, p. 529 and PPSAI 1931, Simla, 6 June, No. 22, p. 356.
[29] PPSAI 1932, Lahore, 2 January, No. 1, p. 7.
[30] PPSAI 1931, Simla, 5 September, No. 35, p. 540 and PPSAI 1931, Simla, 29 August, No. 34, p. 531.
[31] Punjab States Peoples Party/Society.
[32] For a detailed account on the movement in princely states, see Ramesh Walia, *Praja Mandal Movement in East Punjab States* (Department of Punjab Historical Studies, Punjabi University, 1972). Also see S. Gajrani, *Peasants and Princes: Agrarian Unrest in the East Punjab States, 1920–48* (Anmol Publications, 1987). It should be added, though, that very little work has been done on peasant movements in princely states in British India. Relatively more has been done on their successors in Patiala and East Punjab States Union (PEPSU). See, for example, Mohinder Singh, *Peasant Movement in PEPSU, Punjab* (National Book Organization, 1991), and the second half of Gurharpal Singh's *Communism in the Punjab: A Study of the Movement up to 1967* (South Asia Books, 1994).
[33] Comintern Archives (CA)/F.495/Inv.16/File 43, '*Kisan* Unrest in the Punjab States', pp. 49–58.

This mode of politics would not have been possible without a convergence of socio-economic and political demands. As important as ideological differences were, they had little resonance beyond rhetorical flourishes. In part these convergences were an outcome of appealing to similar constituencies. Thus, both the Kirti Kisan and Akali Dal movements primarily drew their support base from the central Punjabi Jat Sikh peasantry. Aside from their demands for Swaraj, which inevitably came with multiple interpretations, both parties had similar agendas insofar as agrarian concerns and the economic welfare of *zamindars* were concerned. Standard demands relating to the lowering of land revenue, abolishment of *thikri pehra,* lowering of water taxes (*abiana*), and other local concerns were frequently raised by both, and other, political parties. The key differences lay in what those immediate and contextually specific demands were eventually linked to. Kirti leaders, thus, frequently linked their localized concerns with their broader struggle against the imperialist and capitalist world order, and most importantly their involvement in the global project of Communist Internationalism. While such invocations were also common in Akali meetings, emphasis instead was placed on socio-religious and communitarian issues. For activists in multiple organizations, political rhetoric could always be tailored to suit specific issues and audiences.

That said, it is worth mentioning that these instances of collaboration were also tied to specific sites. At the local level, there was a far greater degree of collaboration between activists of various political parties. It was again at the local level where multiple organizational affiliations were in evidence. This was especially the case for localities, such as Guru-ka-Bagh or Tarn Taran, which had a shared memory and experience of political struggles. Here, in the heartland of Akali Dal politics, it was usual for Akalis allied with the Kirti Sabha to rally their agrarian base through the banner of socialism. Similarly, Kirti Party *diwans* were also frequently organized at the site, each of which was attended by sizeable audiences varying between 800 to 1200 peasants from surrounding villages. Another, albeit ironical, measure of its success in communist mobilization in Akali heartlands was the high number of Kirti arrests that took place at Guru-ka-Bagh. Indeed, the district of Amritsar alone, for example – where Guru-ka-Bagh and Tarn Taran were located – frequently accounted for one-fourth of all Kirti arrests.[34]

If matters were considerably more complex at the grassroots, ideological and political distinctions were far more apparent higher up the

[34] See for example PPSAI 1931, Departmental Notice, 15 August, No. 32, p. 515.

leadership chain. Leaders like Master Tara Singh of the Akali Dal, for instance, were preoccupied with the interests of the Sikh community over and above other political causes. But even Tara Singh was compelled to engage with leftist idioms that had become commonplace in Punjabi politics. Their perfunctory expressions of solidarity with the Left and rhetorical invocations of 'communism' aside, the leadership of these organizations was also compelled to appropriate revolutionaries that were associated with the radical leftist politics. Even a relatively centrist organization like the Central Sikh League was compelled to organize conferences at which Bhagat Singh and 'revolutionary terrorism' were glorified.[35] The same held true for the 'martyrs' of the Ghadar rebellion as well as political prisoners serving sentences for their seditious activism. While this pantheon of heroes was often presented as exclusively 'Sikh' rather than 'communist' or even 'revolutionary', their appropriation did signify the extent to which radical politics had become embedded in the Punjab. It also showed how communist, revolutionary, and leftist idioms in general had a resonance and influence far out of proportion to the actual numbers of self-professed revolutionaries.

In turn, this also meant that communism in the Punjab was distinctly Punjabi in character. While organizations such the Kirti Sabha and its succeeding avatars could always claim a cross-communal membership and ideology, in practice their support base was mostly constituted of the central Punjabi Jat Sikh peasantry. Their politics, then, was not adequately representative of the agricultural poor or lower castes for that matter. As I have pointed out in line with other scholars, political mobilization was along the lines of both community, caste and class.[36] This did not represent a failure of leftist politics to appeal to non-Jat Sikh rural tracts beyond central Punjab. Neither did it signify that 'Muslims' in particular considered communism to be essentially 'non-Muslim'. Indeed, there has been a significant commentary on the lack of 'Muslims' in the communist movement, not least by the Left itself, which resorted to colonial tropes in referring to the 'backward' and religiously inclined 'Muslim masses'. Other writers on the Left have commented on this as well, thereby leading to a hint of religious and cultural explanations concerning the predominance of 'Sikhs' in the 'communist' movement.

Briefly put, I disagree with this assessment. As I have shown, the development of 'communism' was the outcome of a convergence of

[35] PPSAI 1931, Lahore, 11 April, No. 15, pp. 236–237.
[36] See for example G. Singh, *Communism in the Punjab*, p. 111. That said, these accounts do not adequately explain why this was the case.

specific factors. The fact that the Left was unable to create a deep-rooted presence beyond central Punjab was also influenced by an uneven Punjabi provincial landscape. Elsewhere in the province, and particularly in its western tracts, local politics was subject to restrictive patron–client networks. These did not just include feudal lords and *pirs*. Rather, it also encompassed relations between the landed and non-landed. With central Punjab, these networks, while relatively flexible from the rest of the province, were also significantly shaped by the experience of long periods of anti-colonial struggle and migration. Moreover, in the 'indigenization' of 'communism', it was far easier to target familiar and proximate groups with similar reference points and a shared history of political struggle. This was again where certain localities became important and this was how the villages of revered Ghadarite *Babas* and prominent leftists acted as prominent sites for radical politics. It was also this differentiation that partly explained how central Punjab could be a military recruiting ground as well as a centre for radical politics.[37] Thus, in the context of local politics, the Punjabi Left invariably had a greater impact among certain groups of central Punjabi 'Jat Sikhs'.

Other Threads

Still, there were other connections and overlaps that did not necessarily align themselves along caste or communitarian lines. It is worth pointing those out, if only to further emphasize the entangled nature of local politics with which the Left was bound up. A good example of that was in the productive but equally fraught relationship the Left had with the Indian National Congress. As the leading organization in the subcontinent, the Congress was home to widely diverse, and divergent, political expressions. Its affiliate in the Punjab was no different. This was despite the fact that the Punjab Congress, in stark contrast to most provinces, was decidedly not the dominant political party in the province. Provincial politics for the most part was dominated by the Unionist Party, a cross-communal alliance of landed and agriculturist interests faithful to the Empire.[38] Still, the Punjab Congress – even if it was electorally

[37] Indeed, the two developments could not naturally occur without some tension between them. Thus, this political atmosphere inevitably had an impact on serving and demobilized soldiers from this area. For instance, the Sikh Central India Horse regiment, which mutinied during the Second World War, was largely recruited from these areas. See Chapter 7 for a brief account of this episode.

[38] For a broad overview of Unionist politics in the Punjab, see Ian Talbot, *Khizr Tiwana, the Punjab Unionist Party and the Partition of India* (Routledge, 1996).

insignificant, strife-torn, and largely representative of urban, commercial interests – was the preeminent nationalist platform in the province by virtue of its association with its All India counterpart.[39] For that reason, the party attracted a wide range of political actors, from communitarian groups to avowed revolutionaries and leftists. Despite their reservations with the Congress and its brand of politics, there were few options but to engage with it, and, if possible, reorient it in a different direction.

It was perfectly sensible, therefore, for Darshan Singh Pheruman to be affiliated with the Indian National Congress too. His colonial biography reports that he was elected as the General Secretary of the Amritsar District Congress in 1929. He was also arrested at Tarn Taran for 'active participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement'. In that, he was hardly alone, for he was among scores of Akalis and leftists who also conducted their politics on the Congress platform. To those, one can also add committed and lifelong Congressites who were inclined towards the Left. For Dr Satyapal and Saifuddin Kitchlew, two stalwarts of the Punjab Congress, political life was regularly occupied by leftist student conferences, labour meetings, and Kirti Kisan rallies. Dr Satyapal, in fact, played a key role in founding the Naujawan Bharat Sabha in 1926.[40] Similarly, Sohan Singh Josh, Ram Chandra, and other leftists were regular fixtures on Congress platforms.[41] Jawaharlal Nehru too, as the previous chapter noted, regularly chaired and expressed his socialist convictions at leftist conferences in his many trips to the Punjab.[42] His rhetoric also placated the anxieties that many may have had regarding their association with the Congress. Nehru's speeches frequently paid

[39] It is worthwhile pointing out that despite a plethora of excellent studies on provincial and local nationalist politics, the Punjab Congress has rarely been subject to close scrutiny. The lack of literature becomes even more glaring when compared to studies on the Congress movement in Bengal, Bombay, and the United Provinces. This again is reflective of the relative weakness of the Punjab Congress. Still, there have been a few works that provide a very useful overview of Congress politics in the Punjab. See for example Prem Chowdhry, 'Social Support Base and Electoral Politics: The Congress in Colonial Southeast Punjab', *Modern Asian Studies* 25, 4 (October 1991), 811–831; Norman G. Barrier, 'The Arya Samaj and Congress Politics in the Punjab, 1894–1908', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 26, 3 (May 1967), 364–373; Gerald A. Heeger, 'The Growth of the Congress Movement in Punjab, 1920–1940', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 32, 1 (November 1972). Lastly, a more recent study, Neeti Nair, *Changing Homelands: Hindu Politics and the Partition of India* (Harvard University Press, 2011), deftly charts the provincial political landscape and provides an excellent backdrop in which the politics of the Congress can be placed.

[40] PPSAI 1926, Simla-E, 12 June, No. 23, p. 260.

[41] See for instance PPSAI 1928, Lahore, 21 April, No. 16, pp. 172–176; Simla, 26 May, No. 20, p. 213; Simla, 23 June, No. 24, p. 261.

[42] See for instance PPSAI 1928, Lahore, 21 April, No. 16, p. 173.

homage to the successes of the Soviet Union and the spread of revolutionary ideals throughout the world, while his tours and rhetorical flourishes were regularly greeted with the cries of '*Inquilab Zindabad*'. 'Socialism' and calls for the formation of a 'socialist government' were now the labels that had wide currency.[43] And one of the most vocal of them all, Mian Iftikharuddin, communist and president of the Punjab Party in the 1940s before his defection to the Muslim League, made a name for himself fiercely denouncing imperialists, landed interests, capitalists, and defending revolutionary and communist stalwarts in the Punjab Legislative Assembly.[44]

Still, these multiple political and organizational affiliations did not necessarily mean that political differences did not exist. In the previous chapter, I demonstrated through the example of Sohan Singh Josh how communists frequently critiqued the Congress from its position on violence to its allegedly restrictive idea of *Swaraj*. For their part, staunch Congressites like Satyapal and Kitchlew often shied away from preaching open revolution. Kitchlew, for instance, declared at a public meeting that he approved of Bolshevism if it meant social reform.[45] While also critical of Congress policy and the communalist and reactionary tendencies within it, these individuals were also quick in counselling patience to those frustrated by the party's seeming inability to adopt a more radical agenda for struggle and national liberation. These balancing acts were also reciprocated by avowed revolutionaries like Josh. While still critical of the Congress, he nevertheless did not sever his connections with it. Instead, he was counselling in 1928 that whereas the 'young men of India' were opposed to the 'spirit of comprises' prevalent in it', they were nevertheless 'anxious to capture the Congress and to conduct its affairs themselves'.[46] His statement encapsulated the political strategy of leftists in the 1920s and 1930s. Frequently, these battles were fought in local politics, with village, tehsil, district, and provincial committees working as platforms where communists were elected to the Congress Party.[47] In the heady atmosphere of this period, the Congress, in spite of its vacillating and reluctant postures, still offered considerable potential for the

[43] See for instance PPSAI 1936, Simla-E, 1 August, No. 30, p. 382; Simla-E, 8 August, No. 31, p. 400.
[44] I have written elsewhere about Mian Iftikharuddin's politics. See Ali Raza, 'The Illusory Promise of Freedom: Mian Iftikhar-ud-Din and the Movement for Pakistan', in Ali Usman Qasmi and Megan Robb (eds.), *Muslims against the Muslim League* (Cambridge University Press, 2017).
[45] PPSAI 1929, Lahore, 16 February, No. 7, p. 74.
[46] PPSAI 1928, Simla-E, 26 May, No. 20, p. 216.
[47] See for example Sidhu, *Bujha Singh: An Untold Story*, p. 53.

realization of their political aspirations. This was indicative of the possibilities latent in a yet amorphous Congress that could be pulled in nearly any political direction whether in the province or at the centre.

Other political groups drew similar conclusions. Indeed, there are few examples as evocative and suggestive of what the Congress bandwagon looked like than the following report on Nehru's visit to the Punjab in 1936:

> Some fifty to sixty thousands thronged the route of Pandit Jawahar Lal's procession at Gujranwala on the 30th May. Ceiling fans and loud speakers were installed in the streets and standards with 'Long Live the Soviet Government,' 'Long Live Revolution' and other Communist and Congress slogans were displayed. The procession was organized as follows:
>
> 1. Roshan Lal Yas, a Socialist, leading with a red flag.
> 2. A band.
> 3. A party of 36 *Khaksars* led by Sufi Abdul Aziz.
> 4. 25 men of the National League, Gujranwala, led by Mir Muhammad Bakhsh, pleader.
> 5. About 100 women.
> 6. 150 men from the *Bal Mahabir Dal.*
> 7. 100 *Ahrars* led by Abdul Wahid.
> 8. A sword stick party.
> 9. 150 men of the Gujranwala Labour Party carrying standards with Communist slogans.
> 10. 150 *Akalis.*[48]

Parting of Ways

Such demonstrations of political fluidity, and occasional unity, grew increasingly tenuous over the course of the interwar period. How those shifts were tied to the Congress, and its affiliate, the Congress Socialist Party, is a story covered more fully in the following two chapters. To return to the Akalis and the Left, it is worthwhile reminding ourselves that when the Ghadar Directory was issued in 1933–34, Darshan Singh Pheruman was still considered a 'prominent Akali and Kirti Kisan worker'. For him and scores of likeminded activists, though, the space for political syncretism became narrower from the mid-1930s onwards. Underlying differences that had long been overshadowed by common objectives and memories of shared struggle began emerging to the fore. As far as the Kirti Kisan and Akali movements were concerned, these

[48] PPSAI 1936, Simla-E, 6 June, No. 22, p. 268. The Khaksars and the Ahrars were Muslim communitarian organizations, while the Mahabir Dal was a Hindu communitarian organization.

fissures were perhaps an inevitable outcome of drawing from and appealing to an almost identical support base. Indications of political competition between the two began surfacing by the early 1930s. In recognition of the popularity quickly attainted by the Kirti Kisan Party, the Akalis, in tandem with other groups, established their own 'Kisan Sabhas', which, while working on similar issues, 'abjure[d] the communism of the Kirti Kisan Sabha proper'.[49] What was true of the Akalis was equally true for other parties as they founded their own *Zamindar*, *Kisan* and *Mazdoor Sabhas* in Punjab and elsewhere. For their part, Kirti activists were also anxious not to completely cede the communitarian arena to their Akali counterparts. After all, many of them were still part of the SGPC and the Akali Dal. Even those wary of the politics of community and faith moderated their tone to avoid disputes and confrontations with their counterparts.[50]

But such episodes of cooperation intermixed with subtle competition were always vulnerable to shifts in the wider political climate. As far as the engagement between the Left and 'Sikh' communitarianism was concerned, a marked shift occurred in the mid-1930s as the rancorous debates on constitutional reform and communal representation began to have an impact in the Punjab. In this regard, a key shift had already taken place in Sikh politics with the 1932 Communal Award. Fearing domination by a 'Muslim Raj', the award continued to impact Sikh and Akali politics for years afterwards.[51] In the ensuing vitriol, any attempts at advocating communal unity and combating imperialism – as the Left was wont to do – were invariably scorned. Increasingly, considerations of community became paramount as Sikh parties worked to ensure a greater share of the spoils in future constitutional arrangements. A good indication of this overriding preoccupation came with the rather frantic attempts at reclaiming untouchables for the Sikh fold. Indeed, the latter found themselves in the rather strange position of being courted by communitarian groups, Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh, all seeking to augment their numbers in a constitutional game in which population sizes mattered.[52] To make matters worse, the colonial state too drove a wedge between communitarian and leftist politics by singling out and persecuting communists for their allegedly subversive activities.[53]

[49] PPSAI 1931, Simla-E, 30 May, No. 21, p. 337. [50] Ibid.
[51] PPSAI 1934, Lahore, 31 March, No. 13, p. 169.
[52] See for instance PPSAI 1934, Lahore, 20 January, No. 3, p. 26 and PPSSAI 1936, Lahore, 18 April, No. 16, p. 178.
[53] Indeed, a number of 'communist' organizations were also banned in 1934. This episode is extensively covered in the following chapter.

With an ever-increasing distinction between 'Sikh' and 'leftist' politics, competition between political parties intensified. Communitarian parties like the Central Akali Dal and SA Dal now manoeuvred to exercise influence over the Sikh peasantry through their *Kisan*, *Zamindara*, and *Qarza* leagues.[54] While these moves may have been viewed with relative indifference by their rivals a few years before, in the charged political atmosphere of the Punjab, they were now perceived as part of a zero-sum game aimed at claiming the sole right to speak for Sikhs.[55] These manoeuvres were not just an attempt to counteract the influence of the 'communists', but were also aimed at displacing other communitarian rivals. Predictably, for some within the Left, the establishment of an assortment of *sabhas* was a challenge that needed to be met with rival *sabhas*. Sohan Singh Josh and his compatriots, for instance, viewed the formation of Akali-backed leagues as an attempt to 'cut the ground from beneath the feet of Communist workers'. In doing so, they reportedly argued, not entirely without reason, that these front organizations would be 'communal in character' and would 'follow the lead' of those who brought them into existence. Meanwhile, their activities would 'make it more difficult for communist workers to gain any hold on the rural population'. To circumvent this, a proposal for establishing an issue-specific Punjab Kisan Qarza League was made. Its stated purpose? To start an agitation against rural indebtedness and reclaim the ground gained by 'communal' leagues.[56] Inevitably, and true to the pattern of an increasingly fratricidal Punjabi landscape, this move was soon followed by a decision of the Akali Dal to establish its very own Qarza League.[57]

Competition between these organizations, as well as within the Left, intensified with the onset of elections. Internally, SGPC elections happened to be the primary electoral battleground between Sikh communitarian parties and the Left. While the predominance of the Akalis was almost guaranteed in SGPC elections, 'Communists' and/or 'Ghadarites' also managed to get themselves nominated and elected on virtually every local gurdwara committee.[58] Again, while increasingly contentious, the presence of communists and radicals in grassroots SGPC committees was yet another indication of how deeply embedded the Left was in the local arena. Beyond regular SGPC elections, the provincial elections in 1936–37 further intensified these rivalries. True

[54] PPSAI 1934, Lahore, 14 April, No. 15, p. 186; PPSAI 1934, 'Departmental Notice', Simla-E, 26 May, No. 28, p. 245; PPSAI 1934, Simla-E, 21 July, No. 28, p. 307.
[55] As an example, PPSAI 1935, Lahore, 2 February, No. 5, p. 5.
[56] PPSAI 1935, Lahore, 9 February, No. 6, p. 59.
[57] PPSAI 1935, Lahore, 2 November, No. 41, pp. 491–492.
[58] PPSAI 1936, Lahore, 29 February, No. 9, p. 106.

to the prediction that they would provide an 'interesting spectacle of interparty strife',[59] the run-up to the elections encouraged rival camps to further distinguish themselves from their rivals. For the first time, attacks were publicly launched against each other. While 'communalism' and 'communal parties' had always been condemned by leftists, the Akalis were spared this criticism on account of their anti-imperialist past. The logic of elections, however, ensured that the Akalis were accused not just of 'communalism', but also 'dishonesty' and 'corruption'. They were condemned for being worse than the *mahants* they displaced during the Gurdwara Reform Movement. In listing the alleged offences of the Akalis, the Sikh electorate was warned not to vote for Akali candidates in favour of the electoral front for the Punjab Congress Socialist Party, the electoral and political front for most Punjabi leftists. After all, the 'present struggle for existence was a class struggle between capitalism and labour'.[60]

The aftermath of the elections cemented these political divisions. With notable exceptions, many within Sikh and leftist parties now saw themselves as bitter rivals in a zero-sum game, a development that is perhaps best reflected in this excerpt from a police report:

> S Pratap Singh M.L.A. viewed with great concern the effects of socialist preaching's on the Sikh masses. He said that the Sikhs were discarding their faith and having their hair trimmed and beards shaved under the influence of socialist propaganda. He felt that immediate measures should be adopted to counteract the anti-religious tendencies engendered by the spread of socialism. At this stage, Phuman Singh Ajit pointed out that there appeared to him a clear contradiction in the professions and actions of the Akalis inasmuch as, while the Akali party was inveighing against the socialists as the inveterate enemies of its faith, several Gurdwara committees in which the Akali element predominated were financing socialist workers from Gurdwara funds and presenting them with *saropas* … Master Tara Singh promised to make an early enquiry into the allegations. The majority of those present at the meetings was of the opinion that the only solution of the party's difficulties lay in adopting the congress and socialist programmes in their entirety and thereby weaning the Sikh masses from the pernicious influence of communism. Particular stress was laid on the importance of a comprehensive agrarian programme of work'. Following this, a resolution was also passed 'urging the necessity of counteracting socialist propaganda against Sikhism'.[61]

In a way that few would have imagined some years before, the clear division between an Akali-defined 'Sikh' politics and 'communism' and

[59] PPSAI 1936, Lahore, 25 April, No. 17, p. 191.
[60] PPSAI 1936, Simla-E, 3 October, No. 39, p. 478.
[61] PPSAI 1937, Lahore, 1 May, No. 18, pp. 244–245.

5.1 Darshan Singh Pheruman (second from left) under arrest in Amritsar following his participation in a 1938 *mogha* (canal) *morcha*. He is standing alongside communist activists, including Sohan Singh Bhakna (second from right).
Source: Amarjit Chandan Collection

'socialism' was complete. While leftists were long suspected for their alleged non-religious proclivities, they had rarely been cast as an existential threat to Sikh faith and identity itself. At the same time, Pratap Singh's call for 'weaning the Sikh masses' from the 'pernicious influence of communism' through its own 'socialist' and 'agrarian programme' also reflected the Left's success as a significant political force. Given the relentless state persecution against them, this was a considerable achievement by any measure. Matters, however, were less clear cut at the grassroots level. Thus, while its leadership was busy condemning socialists and communists, several Akali-dominated gurdwara committees 'were financing socialist workers from Gurdwara funds and presenting them with *Saropas*'. Notwithstanding this, the division between two erstwhile allies was now beyond repair, and the contest between them would become ever more fractious in the run-up to decolonization.

On Historical Amnesia

How did Darshan Singh Pheruman navigate this changing political landscape? Like other Akalis, he too decisively broke away from his erstwhile

comrades in the Kirti–communist movement. In the early 1940s he was busy organizing rival Kisan committees in an attempt to undercut the influence of the communist-influenced Punjab Kisan Committee.[62] He also participated in the Quit India Movement. Like tens of thousands of others, he too was arrested.[63] Released in 1944, Darshan Singh Pheruman rejoined Akali politics with vigour. His first political engagement immediately following his release was in the fifth All India Akali conference. At the conference, he shared a platform with Akali speakers who repeatedly denounced communists, the Congress, and the Muslim League for their alleged enmity towards Sikhs. They also demanded that Sikhs should have their own autonomous state.[64] The political and communal tensions on display in the conference only intensified in the following years. Here too, Pheruman played his part in Akali organization and mobilization. There is little reporting of him in 1947, but there are other reports that suggest that he too was involved with the Akali *Sena* (Army) and the massacres of Partition.[65]

In contrast, Pheruman's post-Partition politics is well documented. Among other roles, he served as a member of the Rajya Sabha.[66] He was also affiliated with the Indian National Congress until 1959, when he left and joined C. Rajagopalachari's Swatantra (Freedom) Party, which was critical of Nehruvian socialism. Finally, he also devoted himself to the *Punjabi Suba* movement, the *cause célèbre* of post-Partition Akali and Sikh nationalist politics. The movement demanded the reorganization of Indian Punjab along linguistic lines, which would implicitly give Sikhs a numerical majority in a restricted province. Eventually, in 1966, the Indian Government trifurcated post-Partition Indian Punjab into three states: Punjab, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh. While this was a partial victory for the movement, it did not satisfactorily resolve the question of a number of districts, including the city of Chandigarh, which had not been included in the newly constituted Punjab state. It was in protest of that decision, and the failure of the Sikh leadership to

[62] PPSAI 1942, Simla-E, 8 August, No. 32, p. 458.
[63] PPSAI 1942, Lahore, 22 August, No. 34, p. 488.
[64] PPSAI 1944, Lahore, 21 October, No. 43, p. 592.
[65] The Akal Fauj or Akali Sena was reorganized in 1946 and 1947, ostensibly for defending Sikhs, but it also played a key role in the ethnic cleansing and killings of Muslims in East Punjab. See the fortnightly police reporting in PPSAI 1947. Darshan Singh Pheruman was allegedly involved in the murder of a communist, Gehal Singh Chhajjalvaddi, who was abducted one evening while he was cycling home. Accused of helping Muslims, Gehal Singh was tortured, hacked to pieces, and thrown in the furnace of the Golden Temple. Amarjit Chandan interview with the family of Gehal Singh, *Surakh Rekha*, October 1983.
[66] The upper house of the Indian Parliament.

see the movement through, that Pheruman undertook a *maran vrat*, a fast unto death. He paid the ultimate price for his devotion on the 74th day of his fast. For his supreme sacrifice, he entered the pantheon of Sikh heroes and martyrs.[67]

Pheruman is remembered today as an *amar shaheed.* His memory is still invoked in Punjabi politics, with political rallies, public commemorations, and TV documentaries paying rich tribute to a life of tribulation and ultimate sacrifice.[68] Meanwhile, the school and college in Rayya still proudly bear his name. His pre-Partition political life is also remembered in glowing terms. He devoted his life to the *panth* and the nation through his active participation in the Gurdwara Reform and then the Civil Disobedience and Quit India movements. And that is how his life is exclusively remembered: as a devout Sikh and a devout nationalist. Forgotten in this re-membering is a past that held out different possibilities, a past in which communism and socialism were as much a part of Darshan Singh's political horizons as his commitments to his nation and *panth.*

What is at stake in highlighting these messy histories? At the very least, it compels a reassessment of memorialized pasts that are commemorated, written, and narrated separately from each other. There is little recognition today that what appear to be distinct histories were created in tandem with each other. And it is through the reinvention of these pasts that other histories – and futures – of belonging are ignored, erased, and forgotten. Indeed, the history of the Left stands as a testament to that. But as this and the previous chapter have shown, there was a moment in the early interwar period when there was little to separate 'communitarian', 'nationalist', and 'communist' politics. 'Sikh' histories were at the same time 'communist' and 'nationalist' too, just as 'communist' histories were 'Sikh' and 'nationalist'. Indeed, references to idioms normatively associated with the 'Left', were so ubiquitous in the 1920s and early 1930s that it is quite impossible, if not pointless, to outline its exact contours. As elsewhere in India, socialism and Communist Internationalism were refracted through very localized idioms. This view from specific histories and geographies is what made leftist politics so intriguing, and different, from a view of communism, or nationalism for that matter, from party ideologues at the All India level. If these were times marked by utopianism, they were also marked by ideological and political

[67] See the entry on Darshan Singh Pheruman in the *Sikh Encyclopaedia,* www.thesikhencyclopedia.com/sikh-political-figures/darshan-singh-pheruman.

[68] See for example 'Special Programme Darshan Singh Pheruman: A Forgotten Martyr 01', www.youtube.com/watch?v=SiykEBHJh7o.

fluidity. Indeed, this was precisely how Pheruman emerged as a product of this fertile and vibrant political landscape. But his political career also exemplified the trajectory of interwar internationalism. What began as a broad and fluid coalition that incorporated a variety of political strands and ideas, fractured and crystallized over the 1930s. Insofar as the Left was concerned, this was very much a story about the gradual *restriction* of political space. In this process, regional politics kept in step with shifts in the international communist movement with its move towards Stalinist orthodoxy. Together, these processes led to the creation of increasingly distinct political and ideological camps. None of this, however, would have been possible without the key role played by the colonial state in crafting a political space in which multiple organizational and ideological affiliations were increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to negotiate. It is to this story that this account now turns.

6 Red Scare

> On Earth, they were building a kingdom more bright *than any heaven had to offer,* and for which it was a glory to die…[1]
>
> John Reed, *Ten Days That Shook the World*

Buried deep within the millions of pages of Comintern documents are an innocuously named set of files relating to the communist movement in India. Running into tens and thousands of pages in many languages, these files provide a remarkably detailed and varied overview of Indian communism and much else besides. These include, but are not limited to, meticulously kept 'personal' files on communist activists, leaders, and other important Indian personalities; internal Comintern debates regarding India; detailed commentaries on socialist, communist, and revolutionary movements; their propaganda literature, which includes pamphlets, newspapers, booklets, posters, and leaflets; their memos, correspondence, resolutions, pompous declarations, and triumphant reports; and an assorted array of handwritten letters, reports, completed questionnaires, and petitions handed in by Indian revolutionaries in Moscow. More intriguingly, these files also contain descriptions of British–Indian military installations, excerpts from secret intelligence reports on communism, reports of internal meetings of the Congress high command and other parties, and detailed analyses of the ever-evolving political situation in India. All these point to the existence of a Soviet espionage network in India. In that, they were also helped by the comrades themselves, who liberally supplied (often far-fetched) information to their interlocutors in Moscow to pass themselves off as indispensable operatives of the Comintern. Often, that also meant denouncing rivals within the communist and socialist movement. Thus, a variety of charges – from ideological deviancy and political ineptitude to corruption, betrayal, womanizing, and drinking – were levelled at each

[1] John Reed, *Ten Days That Shook the World* (1919), www.marxists.org/archive/reed/1919/10days/10days/.

other by opposing camps. The idea, it seems, was that the Comintern would advise, mediate, admonish, and, if need be, disavow one faction in preference to the other. It goes without saying, of course, that the extent and depth of this documentation varied from year to year.

From the vantage point of this archive, it seems there was little in the Indian communist, socialist, revolutionary, and nationalist movements that the Comintern was not aware of. And when speaking only of the communist movement, it seems as if Indian comrades – for all their messiness, disorganization, and internal disputes – were inseparably tied to the Comintern and, by extension, to the Soviet Union. It seemed there was little that the Indian communist movement could do without the blessings, advice, and permission of the Comintern and the Communist Party of Great Britain. At the same time, it seemed that questions of political and ideological conformity were prized above all others, especially in the 1930s when Stalinization was well under way in the Soviet Union. But this was also a function of audience. Indian communist groups were understandably keen on telling their interlocutors what they thought they wanted to hear. After all, political standing, financial support, and political and military training were all tied to the patronage of Comintern. All this may merely lend further credence to the charge that Indian communists were supplicants or proxies of the Soviet Union. But that would be missing the extent to which Indian communists considered themselves a crucial, and an equal, adjunct of the international communist movement centred in the Comintern. As many saw it, there was no contradiction between their loyalties to the Communist International and the Soviet Union, and India herself.

That, however, was of little concern to the imperial authorities. As far as they were concerned, the Indian communist movement's extensive contacts with the Comintern confirmed their worst fears about communism. This chapter provides an insight into those anxieties along with the steps the Raj took to suppress the Indian communist movement. I show how the colonial state's approach to communism was tied to how it imagined communism. The first two sections, then, outline the various measures that the Raj adopted in tackling communism; the third offers an extensive overview of a landmark case, the Meerut Conspiracy Case, which provides an excellent illustration of the colonial state's approach to Indian communism. More than that, however, Meerut also profoundly impacted Indian communists and marked a key moment in Indian politics in that it drove a wedge between the politics of internationalism and nationalism. In that sense, Meerut was the first profoundly significant event in a longer process of increasing and sharpening political divides identified in the previous chapter. Meerut left a profound legacy

that long outlasted the case itself. That, in turn, shows the unparalleled impact the colonial state had in defining the course of Indian communism. To this end, then, no study on communism can be complete without a careful analysis of the colonial state. More than any other political actor, or even the Comintern, it was the colonial state that determined the trajectory of Indian communism.

Imagining Communism

Among the many challenges it faced, communism was widely accepted as one of the greatest security threats to the colonial state. Unlike any other movement, Indian communism posed an internal as well as an external threat to the British Empire. The threat was existential and constituted 'the gravest danger to the civilization of the modern world'.[2] The magnitude of the threat was only amplified by the copious reporting and analyses emanating from virtually all arms of the imperial machinery. The most significant of these were regular warnings issued by the imperial security and intelligence services across India and the British Empire.[3] These were distributed to officials across the Raj, including those serving at the district level, and to imperial officials serving elsewhere in the Empire. Within this voluminous archive, few documents were more comprehensive and passionately argued than a series of booklets titled *Communism in India* (1927) and *India and Communism* (1933 and 1935). Published by the Intelligence Bureau of the Home Department, these booklets presented a comprehensive sketch of the communist movement in India and the surrounding region. They were also intended as a warning against complacency on the part of colonial officials. It was, after all, far too easy to attribute to the USSR plans 'which are only

[2] A.K. Mukhopadhyay (ed.), *India and Communism: Secret British Documents* (National Book Agency, 1997; originally published Simla, 1935), preface by H.H. Williamson, Intelligence Bureau Director.

[3] At the highest level, the communist threat was closely monitored by the India Office, in London and its constituent special unit, Indian Political Intelligence (IPI). Headed by the Secretary of State for India and charged with overseeing the administration of British India, the India Office was in an unparalleled position to view the overall threat stemming from the Soviet Union. The IPI was first established in 1909 in response to growing Indian revolutionary activities in Britain. The unit's initial remit was 'to watch anti-British conspiracies in England and Europe, so far as they affect Indian interests'. Later, its remit expanded to include the communist threat along with other areas of concern. The IPI was dissolved following the independence of India. For more, see Richard J. Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence: British Intelligence and the Defence of the Indian Empire 1904–1924* (Frank Cass, 1995). A more concise account is available at the Brill and IPI websites, iias.asia/iiasn/14/Regional/14cbcb07.html and www.brill.com/indian-political-intelligence-ipi-files-1912-1950.

realizable in the dim future' and ignore the gradual progress of communism in India and elsewhere. It was crucial to show concerned officials 'how the sphere of Moscow's influence is gradually encircling India' and 'how her agents are working with ant-like persistence in India itself'.[4]

This was an appropriate metaphor for how communism was viewed by the Empire. It was also an adequate reflection of how reporting on communism was organized, collated, categorized, and narrativized. *India and Communism*, for instance, devotes as much attention to Communism elsewhere as it does to the communist movement in India. Immediately after a section on 'What Communism Means' – a handy two-page primer for readers unaware of communist political, economic, and social objectives – *India and Communism* set out 'Russian methods' and 'their application to India'. The next few chapters examined the advance of communism in India's surroundings, in China, Persia, Afghanistan, Sinkiang, Tibet, Burma, French Indo China, Siam, Straits Settlements, Federated Malay States, and the Dutch East Indies. Even in the section on India, considerable attention is paid to 'foreign direction and assistance', including Moscow's interventions, activities of assorted CPGB and 'foreign agents', and communist conspiracies within Indian communities abroad. The message was thus clear: the content, tone, and tenor of the booklet, much like other reports, made it clear that communism in India was merely an extension of a foreign conspiracy headquartered in Moscow. The purpose was not merely to show how India was being gradually 'encircled'; it was also to show how the progress of communism in Asia provided instructive lessons for officials in British India. Thus, while commenting on the revolutionary upheaval in the British Concession in Hankow, China, in 1927, the report warned against 'the power of the infuriated rabble'. There, the British were driven from their Concession 'not by the armies of Canton' but rather by 'hordes of yelling Chinese, drunk with anti-British hatred'. The lesson was clear: communism could cause considerable 'mischief' in British India were it ever to get a grip on organized or unorganized labour in the country.[5] And for those still in doubt of what a communist victory might mean for India, there were plenty of lurid details of scarcity, starvation, mass killings, and deportations in countries under 'Communist domination'.[6]

This alarmist tone, though, had a number of antecedents. The talk of encirclement and great power rivalry was merely an amplification of

[4] Mukhopadhyay, *India and Communism*, p. 1.
[5] Ibid., p. 19. This passage in turn was excerpted from an earlier version, D. Petrie's 'Communism in India' (1927).
[6] Ibid., p. 5.

long-held anxieties. Since the nineteenth century, the British Empire had been wary of Tsarist Russia. British incursions and interventions in Afghanistan were in part intended to subvert and negate Russian imperial expansion.[7] With the Bolshevik Revolution and its thunderous denunciations of the British Empire and the Raj, the fear of Russian encirclement and expansionism grew even more acute. The converse was true as well, since the export and very survival of communism was understood by Moscow to be inseparably tied to the end of imperialism. As far as the British were concerned, though, communism was Russian in origin and intent. The Comintern was viewed as 'part and parcel of the Russian Communist Party and the Soviet Government', and Soviet declarations to the contrary were derisively dismissed. The Comintern 'was an outcome of the Soviet Government's need for self-reproduction beyond its own frontiers'. If anything, the Soviet Union was incapable of having a non-interventionist policy as 'passivity was incompatible with the theory on which it was founded'. International communism, then, was 'subservient to the requirements of the USSR'. More crucially, the communist movement 'wherever found outside Russia [was] *exotic*'.[8] The battlefield, then, was not merely in India or her peripheries. Nor was it merely restricted to the British Empire. It was instead to be found 'in every country in which Communism had established itself', not least since they could act as 'relay' or 'transmission stations' for the export of communism elsewhere.[9]

A striking feature of these arguments was the fear of *potentialities* not *actualities*. In other words, the anxiety relating to the threat of a communist takeover was out of proportion to the actual state of the moment. Indeed, the government had shown great alacrity in proscribing communist organizations and arresting, convicting, and punishing suspected communists. There was little to suggest – not least to many within other branches of the government – that a communist takeover was imminent. It also helped that the individuals concerned were hardly the brightest or the most effective, as one intelligence assessment after another contemptuously pointed out. What explained these assessments, then? In part, this alarmism was a product of an ingrained institutional outlook within an intelligence and security apparatus obsessed with potential

[7] Otherwise, also referred to as 'the Great Game'. There are many contemporaneous accounts and official reports expressing British anxieties relating to Afghanistan. By way of example, see Frank Noyce, *England, India and Afghanistan: An Essay upon the Relations, Past and Future, Between Afghanistan and the British Empire in India* (Cambridge University Press, 1902). Also see Martin Ewans (ed.), *The Great Game: Britain and Russia in Central Asia: Documents* (Routledge, 2004).

[8] Mukhopadhyay, *India and Communism*, pp. 266–267, my emphasis.

[9] Ibid., p. 273.

threats. It also stemmed from a distinct and disparaging view of Indian society at large. Thus, while comparing the political conditions of Britain and India, the Director of IB remarked that in the former 'the great weapon against Communism is the common sense and political understanding of the bulk of the population'. In marked contrast, India was still 'trying to find her legs in the political world, and political sense [had] not yet spread far downwards'. Her people required much-needed guidance from the privileged few who had the education for assessing 'new creed(s) and shibboleths'.[10] Ironically enough, this patronizing view of the 'masses' was not dissimilar to the views of Indian leaders, not least those within the Left itself. The British argument, however, was also laced with a recognition, and fear, of the economic distress that workers and peasants faced across India, distress that could easily be whipped up by 'skilled agents'. Coming as it did in the wake of the non-cooperation, Akali, and civil disobedience movements, this anxiety only amplified the fear of the perceived fragility and, perhaps, illegitimacy, of British rule itself.

And yet, for all this analysis, there was still something inherently incomprehensible about communism. This is where ostensibly clear-headed and calculated analyses betrayed their limitations. The appeal of communism could not be fully explained or rationalized. How else could one explain repeated references to 'inflamed passions', and 'ants', 'mobs', 'hordes', and 'rabble', all seemingly 'drunk' on hatred? How, indeed, could one explain why communism was repeatedly explained in biological terms? Consider for instance the following passage from *Communism in India*, issued in 1927 by the Intelligence Bureau:

> While the Government's watch on the indigenous forces of disorder must always be sufficiently vigilant to enable it to detect any new accretions of strength, its face must be rigidly set against leaving unclosed any loophole whatsoever by which the agents and doctrines of communism might find admission to this country. It would folly to despise, the day of small things, for the *germ is bound to multiply*, even as that of an *infectious disease*, and to *taint the entire body politic*. It would be as little justifiable for the Government to relax its vigilance in time of peace as it would be for our health authorities to discard precautions when the public health is at its best. Wherever Communism manifests itself, it should be met and *stamped out like the plague*.[11]

At its heart, then, communism was inherently unpredictable and incomprehensible. It could not be reasoned with, which made the

[10] Ibid., pp. 260–261.
[11] Excerpted in ibid., p. 20 from D. Petrie's 'Communism in India'. These assumptions, needless to say, were shared by virtually all volumes in the 'Communism in India' series.

contrast with Gandhian nationalism – gratefully acknowledged for its 'capricious willingness to compromise with the powers that be'[12] – even starker. It could only either be contained or prevented, much like the way the authorities would normally deal with the spread of contagions. And much like a contagion, communism too seemed akin to a pernicious force of nature. For that reason, colonial officials were required to maintain a constant vigil. But as grave as the communist threat was, there was a far greater danger of official complacency. After all, it was only 'apathy and neglect and a complacent attitude' that could make communism 'a serious menace to India's peace and prosperity'.[13]

This in turn indicated that such anxieties were by no means shared equally across the British imperium, particularly lower down the ranks where officials were more preoccupied with day-to-day concerns. It also mattered which branch of the government one was speaking of. At the highest level, the India Office had been concerned, almost to the point of obsession, with the question of communism since the Bolshevik Revolution. The Secretary of State for India repeatedly pressured the incumbent Viceroy to ensure that British India was aggressively combating the spread of communism.[14] Indeed, the Secretary of State himself took a personal interest in day-to-day intelligence at a time when the Communist Party had not even been established in India. In letter after letter, the government of India was queried about its intelligence on the activities and movements of M.N. Roy, Jotindra Mittra, Shaukat Usmani, and others. For its part, the Government of India had a more measured view of the communist threat. In the early 1920s, for instance, it cautioned London for its overly alarmist and zealous tone by pointing out that there was nothing resembling a large-scale communist movement in India. That view changed in the following years as the communist movement increased in scale. As the threat became more pronounced, the Central Government leant on provincial administrations to step up their efforts.

This was where matters became more complicated. For the response of provincial administrations was contingent on specific regional contexts, which were not always neatly aligned with other provinces or with the concerns of Delhi and London. In the Punjab, for instance, the provincial government was far more zealous in its policing and

[12] Ibid., p. 3. [13] Ibid., p. 258.

[14] See for example IOR/L/PJ/12/117, File 6533/1922, 'DIB résumé "Bolshevik Danger in India" Telegram from Sec of State to Viceroy, 3rd September 1922', p. 101; J & P (S) 6975/23 Letter from India Office to Sec of State (Home Department) to GoI, p. 86; and 6975/23 Letter from India Office to Sec of State (Home Department) to GoI, 18 January 1923, pp. 90–92.

surveillance owing to its strategic position as the 'Sword Arm of the Empire'. For the provincial administration, then, the primary task was to insulate military districts and demobilized and serving soldiers, in particular, from the pernicious influence of communists and the Left in general. It did not help, of course, that the Left was strongest in districts most crucial for military recruitment. For that reason, the Provincial Government kept a close eye on agrarian grievances in these districts, which the Punjab Left was all too quick to capitalize on. In times of crises, key measures could be adopted by a flexible and adept provincial administration to placate the peasantry. During the Great Depression, for example, the Provincial Government occasionally remitted land revenue, which, as one intelligence report gleefully reported, took the 'wind out of communist sails'.[15] It also helped that Punjabi interests were ostensibly represented by the cross-communal, agriculturist, and loyalist Unionist Party. Contrast that to the administration's discernibly relaxed attitude in relation to labour agitation in urban centres – except when it related to the strategic North Western Railways – and the anxieties relating to the rural arena were thrown into sharper relief. Similarly, other provinces too had their considerations, and after the 1936/37 elections under the 1935 Government of India Act, it also mattered who ran those provinces. After a Congress Ministry was formed in the United Provinces, for example, the Kirti group shifted its base to Meerut. The Kirtis had far greater flexibility and freedom to work in Meerut than they could have had under the Punjab Ministry of the loyalist Unionist Party.

Tackling Communism

Their disagreements apart, the various arms and levels of the imperial machinery agreed upon the need to stamp out the communist threat. They also shared some fundamental assumptions about communism that invariably affected the way they tackled the threat. Chief among them was the agreement that 'communism' lay well beyond the pale of responsible, respectable, and legitimate politics. It was an entirely different matter how one was to define that sphere, especially in the 1920s and early 1930s, when the leftist movement at large was flexible, fluid, ever-evolving, and continually adapting. At all points, then, the state brought to bear its extensive legislative, executive, administrative, and legal resources not only to effectively tackle the communist threat but also, by extension, to define the parameters of what counted as legitimate politics.

[15] Mukhopadhyay, *India and Communism*, p. 261.

As pointed out earlier in the chapter, the primary responsibility for tackling communism lay with the intelligence and security services of the Raj. With its considerable manpower, resources, and offices at the district, provincial, central, and imperial levels, colonial intelligence laid a web of surveillance and espionage that linked villages in North India to Moscow, European capitals, East Africa, South East Asia, and the United States. Indeed, the very nature of great power rivalry required a coordinated intelligence operation that was global in scope.[16] Facilitating the British Empire in its espionage operations were other empires, notably France and the United States, both equally concerned about the steady expansion of the communist sphere.[17] Movements of suspect individuals; pronouncements of organizations, individuals, assorted newspapers, newsletters, communiqués; and intercepted letters, overheard conversations, and reported sightings were all meticulously shared, documented, reproduced, and analyzed in report after report. Feeding this information was a vast network of consular offices, intelligence posts, 'special branches', and police stations, each of which operated its network of spies, informants, and double agents. Suffice to say, no other movement attracted as much attention in the national and international sphere as the communist movement.

This network was especially widespread and deeply entrenched in British India itself. One intelligence report after another was a testament to how thoroughly the leftist movement had been infiltrated by the police and intelligence services. Police reports from the Punjab, NWFP, Bengal, United Provinces, and others, regularly contained mentions of 'secret' leftist meetings that at times involved only a handful of individuals. A striking feature of these intelligence operations was the obsessive focus on individuals as opposed to organizations. This obsession was shared by intelligence officials in London to police *thanas* at the *tehsil* and village level. This made sense in a political landscape in which organization affiliations were transitory and multiple. Leftist organizations also tended to have relatively short life spans, given the relentless persecution to which they were subject. Many also tended to work underground and could not afford to have a visible presence or structure. It was also easier to prosecute individuals

[16] For an excellent account into how the Indian realm was defended against great power 'intrigues', see Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence*.

[17] For an example of cooperation between the British and the French Empire, see the discussions in IOR/L&J/12/56, 'Pondicherry: Bolshevik Activities' that related to communist activities in Pondicherry. Cooperation with the United States is equally well documented, with the San Francisco Conspiracy Case against the Ghadar Party being a prime example.

than chase illusory organizations that could emerge in different forms once proscribed. But the final word again came from *India and Communism*:

> Nor again should this surveillance be confined to the *organizations*, but must identify and keep tracks of their *individual members.* Since Communism knows no frontiers, yet is centrally directed, it follows that no detail, whether organizational, or personal, whatever the country or the sphere, can be safely ignored as irrelevant to any of one of the countries affected by the general conspiracy.[18]

Here again was an image of a movement, an idea that could not be effectively contained, much less properly understood. It also meant that the figures reported on in colonial documents acquired a larger-than-life image. The most threatening among them commanded a phantasmal presence. They were everywhere and nowhere.

This panoptical web of surveillance was especially pronounced in frontier regions, particularly those bordering Afghanistan and Central Asia. Crucial for preventing the infiltration of revolutionaries fresh from Moscow and elsewhere, this was important for policing the entry of proscribed materials such as arms and ammunition, suspect money orders, and most importantly, 'subversive literature'. In some ways, this was perhaps the most daunting task faced by the intelligence and security apparatuses. It was far easier to pursue, undertake surveillance, and arrest individuals than it was to check the spread of ideas. Weekly reports carried an obligatory list of proscribed and intercepted literature from letters to newspapers to manuals to books. In 1934 alone, for example, the total number of intercepted communist newspapers and periodicals was in the region of 15,000 copies, comprising more than fifty different papers published in ten different countries in Europe, Asia, and North America. This did not include literature proscribed for other reasons. Nor did it give an idea of the number of copies that passed through undetected, often innocuously wrapped in copies of *The Times* or the *New York Herald Tribune*, or popular novels or religious works.[19] This was where the Postal and Customs authorities worked as adjuncts of the Intelligence Bureau.[20] These intercepted publications were added to a continually expanding list of subversive literature printed domestically.[21]

[18] Mukhopadhyay, *India and Communism*, p. 273, emphasis in original.
[19] Ibid., pp. 246–247.
[20] IOR/L/PJ/12/117, 'Bolshevik Danger in India', Telegram from Viceroy to Sec of State, 23 February 1934, p. 94.
[21] For a detailed account of proscription and censorship, see the excellent work of N. Gerald Barrier, *Banned: Controversial Literature and Political Control in British India, 1907–1947* (University of Missouri Press, 1974).

Newspapers and other publications, from infrequently published one-man-run cyclostyled leaflets to major dailies, were anxiously reported on to trace 'subversion' and assess public opinion. Indeed, for a society with very low levels of functional literacy, the concern for the printed word was quite remarkable. Clearly, the word commanded an enviable authority. It had the power to inspire, to mobilize, and to spread in multifarious and unpredictable ways through publicly enacted recitals.

Keeping in step were ever-expanding legislative powers and ordinances specifically introduced to counter the communist threat. To quote but one example, the Post Office and Sea Customs Acts were progressively expanded in the 1920s and 1930s to prohibit the import and circulation of any document 'issued by or emanating from' the Communist International or any affiliated organization or any person associated with such organizations or any document containing reproductions of subversive material in general.[22] The list of blacklisted organizations was quite extensive too. Aside from the Comintern and its affiliates, these included the Kuomintang, the Pan Asiatic League, the Union of the Oppressed Peoples of the East, the Pan Pacific Trade Union Secretariat, the Workers Welfare League of India, the League Against Imperialism, and others.[23] These powers were in addition to special acts and provisions under the Code of Criminal Procedure that empowered central and provincial governments to proscribe any publication remotely considered to be seditious. Provincial governments were also authorized to arrest, intern, exile, temporarily detain, and deny entry to any persons who acted or were about to act 'in a manner prejudicial to the public safety or peace'.[24] This was convenient insofar as it freed provincial administrations from procuring evidence sound enough to obtain convictions in courts. These broad guidelines were predictably open to creative interpretation. Thus, the punishable offence (two years' rigorous imprisonment) under Section 153-A of the Indian Penal Code for promoting 'feelings of enmity or hatred between different classes of His Majesty's subjects' was generously extended to include the 'promotion of class warfare'.[25] This was in addition to the standard charge of 'sedition', on which more will be said in the following pages. In short, then, the Raj was quite proactive in strengthening its legal mechanisms to counter communism.

[22] See for instance the Notification of Customs Act of 1932 in Appendix VII of Mukhopadhyay, *India and Communism*, p. 307.
[23] PPSAI 1927, Departmental Notice, Lahore, 2 April, No. 16, p. 119 and PPSAI 1927, Departmental Notice, Lahore, No. 56, 8 October, p. 437.
[24] Mukhopadhyay, *India and Communism*, p. 251. [25] Ibid., p. 240.

At the provincial and local level, these measures were further supplemented by extraordinary powers vested in local administrations. In Punjab district administrations worked closely with local powerbrokers and intermediaries. Keeping the peace in rural areas was also the responsibility of such *tehsil* and village officials as *zaildars*, *numbardaars*, *sufedposh*, and so on. These officials, along with the local police *thana* and district officials, were the eyes and ears of the state on the ground. They were also charged with keeping an eye on interned (*nazarband*) individuals. *Nazarbandi* had been liberally used to intern thousands of suspected Ghadarites and returning migrants in their villages during the Ghadar rebellion.[26] It was also used extensively to incarcerate Kirti activists and other leftists in their villages. A system of incentives had also long been in place that awarded the 'showing of promptest recognition and, in suitable cases, of liberally rewarding those who furnish active assistance to the police and magistracy in their efforts to cope with crime'. Thus, remissions of land revenue, grants of land, monetary rewards, and public commendations were doled out to encourage local cooperation. Conversely, 'dereliction of duty' on the part of village authorities could be severely dealt with in the form of summary dismissals and the appointment of others considered more trustworthy and well suited to the task. At times, villages had also been subjected to collective punishment by, for instance, saddling them with the upkeep of punitive policing posts (*thikri pehra*).[27] Still, these systems of control, surveillance, and punishment were hardly ever watertight. They were open to subversion and often, in the case of the Akali movement, the target of outright rebellion.

Meerut

For all the varied mechanisms at its disposal, the Raj kept resorting to its courts in its crackdowns on communism. In a few short years after the Revolution, a slew of 'conspiracy cases' were launched against Indian communists. The first of these were the five successive Peshawar Conspiracy Cases. They were followed by the Cawnpore (Kanpur) Conspiracy Case in 1924. Termed the 'first important Communist conspiracy case', Cawnpore marked the first, albeit tentative, attempt by the Raj to outlaw

[26] RPAP 1916, No. 977–8, Lieutenant-Colonel H.T. Dennys, Inspector-General of Police, Punjab to the Additional Secretary to Government, Punjab, Simla, 29 June 1917, p. 24.
[27] Used with much effect during the Ghadar rebellion, RPAP 1914, Proceedings of … the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab in the Home (Police) Department, No. 3243 S, 13 September 1915, pp. 1–2.

communism as an ideology. And yet, if the uncertain conclusion of the trial was any guide, it had been settled that to 'have faith in Communism in itself is no offence'.[28] That at any rate was the assessment of a Calcutta newspaper. It was also an egregiously exaggerated statement, for the Raj remained undeterred in its aim of outlawing communism.

What resulted five years later in 1929 was the most ambitious and expensive trial in the history of the British Raj. Held in the city of Meerut, the case came in the wake of the most serious working-class agitations in Indian history, particularly in the city of Bombay. It also came as a response to the creation of 'workers and peasants' parties across India, which worked for all intents and purposes as fronts for the communist party. The Meerut Conspiracy Case, then, was launched with an ambition and an urgency that betrayed the Raj's anxiety at a growing communist movement in India.

The thirty-one accused, in addition to an absconding Dada Amir Haider Khan, were charged under Section 121 A of the Indian Penal Code with conspiring to 'deprive the King emperor of the Sovereignty of British India'. The conspiracy was allegedly hatched between the accused and national and international organizations, including the Comintern, Krestintern, the Red International of Labour Unions, the CPGB, League Against Imperialism, and others. The list of concerned persons and organizations included the who's who of communists in India and abroad. The detailed charge against the defendants placed the Communist International at the heart of the alleged conspiracy. The Comintern was accused of attempting to overthrow through armed revolution 'all the existing forms of Government throughout the world and to replace them by Soviet Republics subordinate to and controlled by the Central Soviet administration in Moscow'. The means employed? 'Incitement of antagonism between Capital and Labour'; creation of organizations – workers and peasant parties, youth leagues, trade unions etc. – subservient to the Communist International; 'encouragement of strikes, *hartals* and agitations'; propaganda and, last but not the least, encouragement of any and every movement hostile to the government.[29] In short, much like the detailed booklets on communism issued by the Intelligence Bureau, the Meerut Court took an all-enveloping communist conspiracy in India for granted.

By its own admission, the 'case was conducted on a gigantic scale'. The evidence marshalled against the accused consisted of '25 printed

[28] Mukhopadhyay, *India and Communism*, pp. 94–95.
[29] L/P&J/12/673, 'Judgement by RI Yorke, Additional Sessions Judge, Meerut in the Meerut Conspiracy Case King Emperor vs P. Spratt & Others', pp. 1–5.

volumes of folio size'. Altogether, 3500 prosecution exhibits, over 1500 defence exhibits, and 320 witnesses were produced before the honourable court. The judgment itself ran into two volumes totalling nearly 700 pages. The documentary evidence presented by the prosecution consisted of manuscripts, books, pamphlets, letters, and transcribed confessions, all intended to prove the subversive political activities of the accused and, crucially, their association with each other. Another sense of the scale of the accumulated evidence came from the range of languages the court had to contend with. These included English, French, German, Russian, Urdu, Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, Gurumukhi, Goanese, and Tamil. In terms of length too, the trial was a landmark event in the history of the Raj. Its preliminary proceedings took seven months. From there on, the prosecution took thirteen months to present its voluminous evidence. The accused took another ten months to record their statements. Their half-hearted defence took two months to conclude, with arguments continuing for another four and a half months. Finally, the sessions judge, R.I. Yorke, took over five months to pronounce his judgment.[30] Meanwhile, the lead prosecutor, Langford James, died of a heart attack in the courtroom.

By any measure, then, this was an epic trial. In part, it took so long to conclude because the prosecution and the judges involved wished to prove beyond incontrovertible doubt that the accused were involved in a conspiracy. Previous conspiracy cases in Peshawar and Cawnpore had been relatively straightforward in that most of the accused had direct links with Moscow. The majority were *Hijrat* returnees who had either been trained in Moscow or had been involved in subversive activities in Tashkent or elsewhere. In their case, it was simpler to establish their guilt in conspiring to 'deprive the King emperor of the Sovereignty over British India'. This was different. To start with, only a few had direct links with Moscow. But that was not the main concern of the government and the prosecution either. Instead, they ambitiously sought to establish how 'communism', whether in India or elsewhere, was linked in *thought* and *practice* to a worldwide conspiracy centred in Moscow.

The effort required to make this argument beyond any reasonable doubt was evident in the meticulously documented and microscopically detailed judgment delivered by Yorke. The first volume of the judgment, running into more than 300 pages, began with a lengthy exposition of the

[30] L/P&J/12/675, 'Criminal Appeal No 122 of 1933, Meerut Conspiracy Case, Judgement', pp. 1–2 and L/P&J/12/342, 'Committal Order Milner White, Additional District Magistrate in the Meerut Conspiracy Case', p. 12.

central tenets of communism that included detailed analyses of the *Communist Manifesto*, Lenin's *State and Revolution*, Bukharin's *The ABC of Communism*, and other canonical texts in the Marxist–Leninist tradition. These were followed by lengthy biographies of Karl Marx, Lenin, and other central figures; finely grained histories of the Bolshevik Revolution and the First, Second, and Third Internationals; analyses of speeches delivered by Stalin, Zinoviev, and other Soviet apparatchiks; magisterial overviews of affiliated organizations like the CPGB, RILU, LAI, and others; summaries of communist publications in the Soviet Union, Great Britain, India, and elsewhere; detailed accounts of communist conspiracies in India and abroad, including mentions of exchanged letters, alleged conversations, clandestine postal routes, undercover agents, safe houses, union activities, and so on.[31] This was only the first volume. The second contained details of the specific activities of each of the accused. The combined thrust of the judgment sought to establish how the accused illegally conspired to overthrow a government established by *law*. Beyond that, this was surely the most detailed, meticulous, and authoritative overview of the national and international communist movement to be found anywhere. Indeed, it is safe to say that even the accused would have been unaware of the true scale and extent of the conspiracy they were involved in.

Was all this hair-splitting necessary? Not necessarily, in the view of an appeals court taking umbrage over the inordinate length of the trial.[32] At the same time, it was all but unavoidable if communism was to be outlawed in and of itself. For as the Committal Order and the decision of Appeals Court acknowledged, there was nothing objectionable to the mere holding of communist beliefs. The objection was to 'putting those views into practice'.[33] Here the courts were in tricky terrain. Previous attempts had shown that outlawing communism as a set of ideas would be nearly impossible.[34] It would also be impossible to implement. Meerut, then, was an attempt to coming as close as possible to outlawing communism in and of itself by making a very tenuous distinction between *ideas* and *practice*. Ideas were prosecutable only when 'the holding of communist views' involved 'communist practices'.[35] It was clear, then, that the distinction between the two was a legal minefield. Theoretically, a communist working *individually* would not be guilty of conspiracy. Conversely, a professed non-communist was guilty if found to have

[31] L/P&J/12/673, 'Judgement by RI Yorke'. [32] L/P&J/12/675, 'Criminal Appeal', p. 6.
[33] L/P&J/12/342, 'Committal Order Milner White', p. 9.
[34] With the Cawnpore Conspiracy Case being the prime example.
[35] L/P&J/12/342, 'Committal Order Milner White', p. 9.

joined a conspiracy. How was conspiracy to be established, then? From the judgment, it was evident that the evidence of mere *association* with other communists was sufficient to establish proof of conspiracy. This was tantamount to putting communist 'beliefs' into practice. In other words, the accused were effectively convicted for the crime of associating with and even conversing and writing to each other. This was why the judgment went to extraordinary lengths to establish correspondence trails, accounts of meetings, speeches delivered, articles written, and so on. It mattered little that the 'object aimed at in the conspiracy was impracticable', even 'impossible', and that the action of the accused was 'utterly puerile and could not be conceived to lead to any such serious consequences as the accused dreamt of'.[36] Indeed, that was hardly the point. While the accused were involved in far weightier activities (strikes and so on), what mattered for the purposes of establishing a conspiracy was the mere *intention* between fellow conspirators for overthrowing the existing order of things.

There was, however, a far more pernicious logic at work in the entire exercise. Both the detailed charge sheet and the resulting judgment sought to conclusively establish that (a) 'communism' was fundamentally distinct from 'nationalism'; (b) 'communism' was merely an extension of a hostile rival power; and (c) that 'communism' was essentially foreign to India. It is difficult to understate the significance of these changes, for they were considerably more far-reaching in their impact than the clumsy attempts to outlaw communism in the courtroom.

From its very inception, the trial sought to establish why 'communism was not the kind of movement that should receive the sympathy of nationalists'.[37] The lead prosecutor, Langford James, repeatedly contrasted 'communism' with 'nationalism'. For James, the revolution that the accused yearned for was not a national revolution. It was an 'anti-national revolution'.[38] This was a claim the presiding judges agreed with. As the Committal Order clarified, 'nationalism by itself is not being attacked in this case'. A nationalist could desire the complete independence of India, as the communists did, but this would not 'render him liable to prosecution'. Here a contrast was made between the methods employed by 'nationalism' and 'communism', with the 'usual civil channels' of the former being contrasted favourably against the revolutionary

[36] L/P&J/12/675, 'Criminal Appeal', p. 70.
[37] S.S. Josh, *The Great Attack: Meerut Conspiracy Case* (People's Publishing House, 1979), p. 90.
[38] 'Speech of the Prosecutor in the Meerut Case', excerpted in *The Labour Monthly* 12, 1 (January 1939), www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sections/britain/periodicals/labour_monthly/1930/01/x01.htm.

upheaval desired by the latter.[39] More damagingly, both the prosecution and the judgment explicitly equated Communist Internationalism with anti-nationalism. The nationalist's alleged primary loyalty lay towards his nation, not to an abstract notion of internationalism. In any case, Communist Internationalism in the eyes of the court was merely a ruse under which the Soviet Union exercised its hegemony. In short, there was no space here for nationalism and internationalism to coexist. This was a conclusion that many communists would have profoundly disagreed with. Indeed, it was a conclusion that Jawaharlal Nehru would have disagreed with too. The fact that he was not implicated at Meerut, despite his internationalism and despite 'knowing more of communism than the Meerut accused', was a clear indication to the conspirators of how the trial court was seeking to drive a wedge between nationalism and communism.[40]

For those reasons, the government sought to increase the distance between the Congress and the communist movement. This was crucial, not least because prominent nationalist leaders, Jawaharlal Nehru included, had expressed their support and sympathy to the Meerut accused. Unsurprisingly, then, Langford James devoted a substantial section of his opening speech to emphasizing the differences between the Congress and the communists. It was true that the Left, broadly speaking, was highly critical of the Congress, but at the same time it actively worked with the nationalist movement in everyday politics. Those nuances were predictably papered over in James's argument:

> They [the accused] appear to me to entertain feelings of hatred towards a very large number of people, but it is reserved for those gentlemen, who are usually accredited with working for the attainment of Swaraj in India … The Indian National Congress is stigmatised as a misguided bourgeois body, which has to be captured and converted to the peculiar views of these accused or else destroyed. Pandit Motilal Nehru is regarded by them as a dangerous patriot. His son, Jawaharlal Nehru, is dubbed a tepid reformist. Mr. Subash Chunder Bose is a bourgeois and a somewhat ludicrous careerist. Gandhi they regard and dislike as a grotesque reactionary. In his lifetime Lala Lajpat Rai was stigmatised as being personally a scoundrel and politically dangerous, while the late C.R. Das is written down as a poltroon.[41]

To make matters worse, a substantial part of the prosecution and the judgment's charge against the accused rested on proving how 'communism' in its very essence was fundamentally opposed to all things Indian

[39] L/P&J/12/342, 'Committal Order', p. 10. [40] Josh, *The Great Attack*, p. 99.
[41] 'Speech of the Prosecutor in the Meerut Case'.

and to all things human. In that regard, the initial salvo was delivered by James, who claimed in his opening remarks that

> To be a Bolshevik of unimpeachable character, you require certain definite qualifications to which the ordinary man does not aspire. You do not love your country, you are anti-country, you are anti-God and you are anti-family. In fact, a Bolshevik of unimpeachable character is anti-everything which the normal man considers decent! You have ruthlessly to hate those who differ from your views, and when the proper time arrives you have as ruthlessly to kill them. And last, but by no means least, I think it is quite essential that you should have no sense of humour.[42]

Much like everything else, this too was a claim the presiding judge agreed with. In his judgment, Yorke went to great lengths to show how communism, from its ideas to its practitioners, was fundamentally opposed to civilized norms and, specifically, religion. This was a well-rehearsed argument familiar to colonial officials too, who had long argued that communism was 'essentially foreign to the ideas and traditions' of India and to the traditions of humanity itself.[43]

These arguments resonated far beyond the confines of the courtroom. From its very inception, Meerut had been a public spectacle with few precedents. Trial proceedings were breathlessly reported and analyzed by the press in India and abroad. Nationally and internationally, Meerut became a *cause célèbre* for trade unionists, anti-imperialists, and leftists of varying persuasions.[44] The fact that three of the accused were British and that the Soviet Union and Communist Internationalism were metaphorically placed in the dock meant that the trial was an international affair from the very beginning. 'Meerut defence funds' were established in India as well as Britain and elsewhere by assorted trade unions, cooperatives, associations, and other organizations all united in decrying the hollowness of colonial justice.[45] In short, notwithstanding the arguments levelled against them, the communists achieved nothing short of a propaganda coup, as the governments in India and Britain quickly realized.

Moreover, Meerut left an indelible imprint on the Indian communist movement and the accused themselves. When they were first arrested, the

[42] Quoted in Josh, *My Tryst with Secularism*, p. 167. Also elaborated in greater detail in Langford James speech. It is telling that Josh quoted this excerpt in his comment on the prosecution's case.

[43] IOR/L/PJ/12/325, 'Measures for Dealing with Communist Activity in India', 'Letter from Secretary, Home Department to the Chief Secretaries of Provinces' on p. 38.

[44] See special issue on Meerut and especially the introduction by Michele Louro and Carolien Stolte, 'The Meerut Case in Comparative and International Perspective', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 33, 3 (2013), 310–315.

[45] See, for example, the many letters, petitions, and intelligence extracts in L/P&J/12/344 'Meerut Defence Fund'.

defendants were incarcerated separately. They were not allowed to see or talk to each other. Nor were they allowed access to reading material. This persisted until protests within the prison and beyond forced the authorities to relax these restrictions. Now housed together in an unused barrack and given access to Marxist–Leninist literature to prepare for their defence, the accused were given an opportunity to chalk out their strategies and lines of defence in the courtroom. This proved to be a godsend to many of the accused. Many had never read those books before. In the all-enveloping and suffocating censorship regime run by the Raj, 'subversive' literature had been very difficult to come by. But with Meerut, the accused were given unrestricted access to texts that many had only heard of and revered from a distance.[46] As Lester Hutchinson recounted later:

> The one bright feature of our imprisonment was that there was no restriction on our reading. We had been allowed to form a small library of proscribed literature to enable us to prepare our defense, but which also served the more useful purpose of enabling us to increase our political and general knowledge. The library was under close supervision in case any of the 'poison' should escape into the outside world and it was periodically inspected to see whether any books were missing. But it was of inestimable value not only to our defense but to our own educational development.[47]

This was the enduring contribution of Meerut University, or 'Meerut Jail University' as Josh called it. For the uninitiated, it offered plentiful opportunities 'to equip themselves politically and theoretically for future work'. The nearly 200 books and pamphlets unwittingly supplied by the government were all new to him. Free to study Marxism–Leninism and to learn from his co-conspirators, Josh underwent a transformation as a self-professed communist. It was a situation that would have been familiar to him. As the last chapter pointed out, the book that changed his life and 'opened a new world for him' passed by him in his earlier imprisonment in the Akali Leaders' Case. Nor was this situation unfamiliar to other political activists. Santokh Singh learnt his Marxism in jail in California; Naina Singh Dhoot relished the intellectual fervent in the Deoli detention camp.[48]

Kalpana Dutt and Bina Das reported similar experiences too. Both were incarcerated in a special detention camp for women political

[46] Ibid., p. 86.

[47] Lester Hutchinson, *Conspiracy at Meerut: An Account of the Trial of the Author and Others, 1929–1933* (G. Allen & Unwin, 1935), p. 126.

[48] Coming seven years after Meerut, Deoli marked another defining moment in the history of the communist movement in India. Once again, communists across India were rounded up and incarcerated collectively. The events leading up to Deoli and its impact are covered more extensively in Chapter 7.

prisoners. Their time in Hijli detention camp came with privileges that were not afforded to common criminals and prisoners.[49] Like the Meerut accused, both women had access to a 'plentiful supply of books' – 'books from home, books purchased by detenues [sic], and books borrowed regularly from the imperial library in Calcutta'.[50] They also participated in games, competitions, musical and theatrical programmes, and debates and discussions. They had, Das wrote, transformed Hijli into a 'mini Shantiniketan'.[51] Kalpana Dutt too, found her life and worldview transformed thanks to her time in Hijli. Until her incarceration, she had only been interested in religious books or, at most, revolutionary literature on Bhagat Singh, Khudiram Bose, Kanailal Dutta. This literature had profoundly moved her, and had taught her 'to defy death', but it was only through her introduction in prison to the literature on communism and socialism that she realized how communists were 'better informed' about the world at large.[52] Thus began her journey to communism.

P.C. Joshi, the first secretary general of the CPI, also commented on this transformation. Writing the preface of a memoir by Kalpana Dutt (who he married) Joshi wrote how the 'cold silent recess of the prison-cell gave [revolutionaries] the time and the opportunity to study and recognize new ideologies'. In communism, he wrote, they found the 'same measure of solidarity, discipline, and selflessness that had marked their own movement'. But they also found something better. From an ideology of 'individual heroism, sacrifice, and unflinching devotion, they moved to the new and broader vista offered by communism in which the people, and not a mere handful of heroes, have to be roused to the consciousness of their strength and greatness'.[53] And while she did not become a communist, Bina Das too, after her studies in prison, summed up the difference between communism and terrorism as the difference between mass movements and individual action.[54] For Naina Singh Dhoot, it seemed that Lenin was right after all: jails truly were universities for

[49] Partly driven by a fear of protests within and beyond prison walls in a political culture where political prisoners and their conditions were celebrated causes, revolutionaries and communists were frequently housed by the government in separate camps, where they were often held in better conditions and given access to copious reading material. This was also reflective an interesting paradox whereby the government detained 'political prisoners without recognizing that these men and women were in jail for political reasons'. See Durba Ghosh's chapter, 'From Political Prisoner to Security Prisoner', in *Gentlemanly Terrorists*.

[50] Das, *Memoir,* p. 39.

[51] Ibid., p. 40f. Shantiniketan was a famed institution of learning established by Rabindranath Tagore.

[52] Kalpana Dutt, *Reminiscences*, pp. 87–89. [53] Ibid., p. 13f. [54] Das, *Memoir,* p. 80.

communists.[55] Given the right conditions, where else could one find time to read, write, think, and debate? Prisons may have been sites of discipline and punishment, but they were also sites of conversion.

Precisely how Meerut proved 'beneficial' to the accused was apparent in their lengthy statements to the court. This was where the educational nature of their imprisonment was most evident. Given the public nature of the trial, what better opportunity could there be to openly publicize their beliefs, especially at a time when the literature they were reading was proscribed and unavailable elsewhere? And so, much to the frustration of the court and the government, Meerut became a giant platform for broadcasting communist doctrines. Every word the accused uttered was diligently noted down by court scribes and by a gleeful press, an 'extravagant waste of time and energy' as the appeals court later pointed out.[56] The accused, or most of them at any rate, had agreed to conduct their own defence; the minority who did not identify themselves as 'communist' chose a different approach. They had also agreed they would not seek to save themselves. Instead, they would 'challenge the very nature of the charge of communist conspiracy and the intention and purpose of the British rulers working behind it'. Every individual was expected to thoroughly orient himself with the case, prepare a statement outlining his political ideals, deny wrongful accusations, and appeal to the lofty ideals of freedom of speech, assembly, and organization. Everyone was also expected to defend the Russian Revolution, Marxism–Leninism, and the ideals of internationalism.[57]

To his credit, Josh stuck to his task admirably well. His statement also conveyed how far he had come in his understanding of 'communism'. If his previous writings in the *Kirti* and reported speeches were anything to go by, it was difficult to imagine the pre-Meerut Josh holding forth on the debates between Lenin and Kautsky and the communist anarchism of Kropotkin.[58] This was a contrast made by Josh himself, who, with more than a tinge of embarrassment, called his pre-Meerut thinking 'utopian' and his Marxism 'crude and immature'.[59]

And yet, for all his precise, 'scientific', and frequently anodyne analysis of agrarian conditions, capital/labour, modes of production,

[55] Dhoot, *The Political Memoirs*, p. 213. Also see Michael Hardt, 'Prison Time', *Yale French Studies* 91 (1997), 64–79 (64).
[56] L/P&J/12/675, 'Criminal Appeal', p. 5.
[57] Josh, *The Great Attack*, pp. 94–95. Also see Muzaffar Ahmad, *Communists Challenge Imperialism from the Dock* (National Book Agency, 1967).
[58] National Archives of India (NAI)/Private Papers/Meerut Conspiracy Case (MCC) Papers, 'Sohan Singh Josh statement to court', pp. 316, 342.
[59] Josh, *My Tryst with Secularism*, p. 185.

Gandhi's duplicity and so on, it is striking how Josh's utopianism and millenarianism still powerfully flickered through. This is what had sustained him all this while. Whatever its educational worth might have been, prison was, after all, prison. And so his speeches and statements before the court were peppered with the utopian promise and the destiny foretold of a better world, a promise that had given him and his co-accused strength, a promise that was duly noted by the court scribes and presiding judges. Those are also the statements the judges *specifically* commented on. Thus, after duly noting the scandal of Josh welcoming 'the epithet Bolshevik', the Additional District Magistrate, Milner White, pointed out:

His [Josh's] peroration traces the future millennium:

> I do not want to be a prophet, but I say that the present century will see Socialism and Communism governing the world, Kingship will wholly vanish from the surface of the earth … Let us, comrades, then fight to bring about such a beautiful order of things. But all this cannot be achieved without revolution, for a revolution is the only friend of the poor and the helpless. It is revolution that can bring real brotherhood and liberty to mankind.

He [Josh] then recited the International and finished up the slogans:

> Long Live the Proletarian Revolution
> Long Live the Soviet Rule
> Long Live Marxism and Leninism
> Long Live the solidarity of the exploited people of the earth
> Long Live the Workers and Peasants Party of India.[60]

Why make a point to highlight these statements? Because they marked out the communists as fanatics who could not be reasoned with, let alone understood. Josh's statement would have been incomprehensible to the presiding judges. Perhaps, these temporal registers could only be understood and enacted by those who inhabited them. It is no coincidence then, that virtually every note on the communists included a deprecating and sardonic comment on their utopianism. It was their utopian and millenarian sensibility that marked them out as dangerous, irrational, and fanatical. This was also why their imagined spread was likened to a virus and why, for all the voluminous analysis of money trails, great power rivalries, workers and peasants' agitations, and local and national politics, there was a millenarian element in communist politics that simply could not be understood or rationalized. It was indeed, to paraphrase John Reed, a glory to die in pursuit of this *earthly* kingdom. For that reason – despite their political insignificance, rank 'idiocy', and

[60] L/P&J/12/342, 'Committal Order', p. 208.

fantastical plans, which had no hope of ever reaching fruition – communists were to be taken seriously, even feared.

The other reason, of course, was that the communists were viewed as proxy agents of the Soviet Union. This was where the accused gave the judges plenty of grist for their arguments. While all denied being in the pay of the Soviets, they unapologetically extolled and glorified the Soviet Union. Nor did they make any bones about their intention of overthrowing the British Raj. That was enough for the court to establish how the accused were linked to an international conspiracy to overthrow the Raj. Found guilty of varying offences, the accused were given a range of punishments. Some were sentenced to transportation for life. Others were sentenced to a few years in prison. Their sentences, however, were reduced on appeal. For the appeals court, the sentences the accused received were disproportionate to their alleged crimes. As it is, they had already spent more than four years in prison for their trial. It also mattered that an Indian judge sat on the appeals court. In due course, then, the Meerut prisoners were gradually released, but only for most of them to take up the mantle of communist politics once again.

A Sharpening Divide

If most of the accused simply went back to their brand of politics after their release, how then do we assess Meerut? Did it mark a defeat for the Raj? If one of the most prolonged, expensive, publicized, and high-stakes trials in the history of the Raj could not deliver a death blow to communism, how could it be anything but a failure? That certainly seems to be the conclusion of virtually all commentaries on Meerut.[61] Unsurprisingly, the most extensive commentaries were authored by the Left. Many were produced by the Meerut accused. Josh, for instance, wrote *The Great Attack*, Lester Hutchinson, *Conspiracy at Meerut*, Muzaffar Ahmad, *Communists Challenge Imperialism from the Dock*, Philip Spratt, *Blowing up India.* Others followed suit with their accounts of Meerut. Meerut also occupied pride of place in the official histories of both CPIs. An entire volume in the *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India*, for example, is dedicated to Meerut. Clearly, Meerut was crucial in how the communist movement defined and understood itself. It was a story of courage, heroism, and sacrifice. It was a testament to colonial injustice. It was a moment when communists defied, and defeated, British

[61] For an illustrative example, see Pramita Ghosh, *Meerut Conspiracy Case and the Left Wing in India* (Papyrus, 1978). Ghosh claimed that 'the Meerut trial appears to have worked less to the advantage of the government than to that of the communists', p. 165.

imperialism. It was, in short, a glorious narrative, a golden chapter, in the history of the communist movement. There was no greater story to be told.

Ironically, this assessment was shared by colonial officials. Meerut *had* been a failure. It had clearly failed to lessen the communist threat to India, let alone deliver a fatal blow to it. And it still left unanswered the perennial question of how communism ought to be tackled. Not only had the judicial system fallen short; it had also given an unrivalled public platform to the communists. And despite their conviction, the fact remained that communism was there to stay. Few summed up the gloomy mood better than the *Indian Annual Register*, published in Calcutta. In its comment on the Great Depression, the *Register* commented:

> Apart from all its aspects of alleged criminality, and all its legal bearings one way or the other, the case represented an Idea that had been slowly but steadily taking root in the soil of India. And it had been a forceful Idea. We are not at all going into the merits of the case. We are referring merely to the very general and very pronounced Labour unrest and Labour upheaval all the world over. Whether one may or may not be prepared to go the whole length with the ideals and methods of Communism, one cannot pretend to be dead to the very wide and active influences seeking at the present moment to right the topsyturvydom of the social framework produced by an over stressed capitalism and restore what is called social balance and justice … This is the Idea, the Urge … The spirit of a revolt against the vested interests as they are called cannot be mistaken. That spirit has been abroad and is stalking this ancient mystical Land. While some are shuddering at its approach and would fain lay it for good, there is a growing number of our younger men and women who would hail it as the deliverer.[62]

The Idea. The Urge. The Spirit. It all went back to that utopian impulse. It also made for a rather gloomy prognosis of the future. History seemed to be on the side of the accused. Given that this came at the height of the Great Depression, it might have seemed like an unavoidable conclusion at the time.

And yet, matters were not as unmanageable as this prognosis would have it. 'Communism' as a movement could not be stopped, but it could be disciplined, be drawn into sharper focus, and made more manageable. This was where Meerut was successful. This was also where Meerut had an impact that long outlasted the trial itself in ways that were not evident to colonial officials at the time. For one, if Meerut as a public spectacle had worked in favour of the communists, it had also, by the same token,

[62] *The Indian Annual Register: An Annual Digest of Public Affairs in India* 1 (January–June 1933), 38.

popularized anti-communist arguments. Throughout the trial, the government's accusations were thoroughly publicized through the press. It mattered, then, that the accused were deliberately branded by the prosecutor as 'Bolsheviks', not 'communists'. It also mattered that the charge of being pro-Soviet, anti-national, and anti-Indian was levelled time and again. That, after all, was what the case was partly about. Equally damaging, though, was the charge of being anti-religion. This was dangerous terrain, especially given the emotive value of this argument. As Langford James had argued,

> There can be no God according to the Soviet creed, and a large part of their propaganda is directed to destroying belief in God, whether he be the God of the Christian, the Jew, the Muhammadan or the Buddhist. The belief in Him is to be destroyed, and if and when the time comes that this reign of destruction comes to India, I am sure belief in the God of Hinduism will also have to be destroyed. All the religions of the world have to be destroyed, according to these gentlemen, and they have gone the length not only of murdering priests and desecrating churches but of setting up classes for the young men and young children to preach to them the gospel of anti-God.[63]

How damaging was this to the communists? It is true that these arguments were not necessarily inaugurated by Meerut. But Meerut did indubitably amplify them, in a way that these accusations became a part of a wider public discourse. Indeed, it is striking how much the later denunciations of communists by the Congress, Muslim League, Akali Party, and rival leftists, mirrored the arguments made at Meerut. This was all too evident for an ever-perceptive Sohan Singh Josh, who wrote many years later that the shadow of Meerut far outlasted the trial and its immediate aftermath. 'It would however be wrong to deny', he admitted, 'that this poisonous propaganda against communism and communists did not cut some ice among nationalists and ignorant people.' For him, the best indication of that was that even after many decades the 'prejudices sown against communists and communism' persisted and refused to die, even among the rural and urban poor, the natural constituency of the communists.[64]

For these reasons, Meerut did eventually work in the favour of the colonial state. This assessment runs counter to the accepted consensus at the time. It also runs counter to a near historiographical consensus which accepts that Meerut worked in the favour of the communist movement. The communist movement had emerged relatively unscathed from the trial, and there was no better indication of that than the reorganization and renewal of the CPI immediately following the release of the Meerut

[63] 'Speech of the Prosecutor in the Meerut Case'. [64] Josh, *The Great Attack*, p. 91.

accused in 1933. More worryingly, the party became formally affiliated to the Communist International in 1934. There was little option left for the authorities except to simply ban the CPI under an executive order. That same year, then, the Central Government under the Criminal Law Amendment Act declared the CPI, its committees, sub-committees, and branches unlawful associations on the 'ground that they constituted a danger to the public peace'. Meerut, the argument went, had not 'caused more than a temporary setback to Communist plans in India'. If anything, the party was reorganizing on a more ambitious scale. As ever, in the paranoiac worldview of the intelligence services, it was not as much the 'immediate activities of the Communists, as their ultimate object' that led to the banning of the CPI. The 'object' was defined as the overthrow of 'the existing order of society and bringing about Indian's independence by means of violent revolution', which would be heralded by 'mass revolutionary action, strikes, demonstrations etc., culminating in general strikes and armed insurrections'. In the final analysis, though, the ban had been imposed

> because experiences had conclusively shown that the ordinary law was inadequate to control Communist activity and because proscription was considered more warranted by circumstances than special legislation and calculated to succeed without resort to frequent and protracted legal proceedings.[65]

In Punjab, the provincial government was only too eager to implement the provisions of the Criminal Law Amendment Act. Interpreting the act liberally, the Punjab government banned five organizations, most of whom had no direct links with the CPI. Indeed, if anything, there were serious rifts between them. Still, all had been classified as 'communist'. Under the act, the Anti-Imperialist League, Naujawan Bharat Sabha, Kirti Kisan Party, Amritsar Kisan Sabha, and Punjab Kisan League were banned. Trade unions and other workers' organizations were spared. The banned organizations revealed the fractured and confounding nature of the Punjab communist movement, as indeed in the rest of the subcontinent. The Anti-Imperialist League, for example, had been founded by Sohan Singh Josh and M.A. Majid after their release from Meerut. Both had apparently been shunned by their former Kirti comrades. The NJBS, after a period of prolonged tension with the KKP, was now allied with it. Meanwhile, the Amritsar Kisan Sabha and the Punjab Kisan League were affiliated with both the Kirti Kisan Party and the Anti-Imperialist League, but claimed an autonomous existence in an

[65] Subodh Roy (ed.), *Communism in India: Unpublished Documents, 1935–1945* (Ganasahitya Prakash, 1976), pp. 89–91.

ultimately futile attempt to escape government persecution.[66] Despite their fractured and divided nature, the provincial government still considered the provincial communist movement a serious threat. Its action also occurred at a fortuitous moment and was perhaps intentionally timed. The proscriptions came at the exact moment when the organizations involved were – after days and weeks of prolonged, tortuous, and acrimonious discussions – on the cusp of forming yet another 'united front'.[67] As ever, unity proved elusive. Overnight, the proscribed organizations announced their dissolution to evade arrest.[68]

But these measures were only half effective. Organizations could be banned; activists and ideas could not. While the ban was a blow to the communist movement, it was viewed by Josh as a 'tribute' to the political work the Meerut accused had done after their release.[69] As with every round of proscriptions, new organizations quickly emerged to replace those that had been banned. Sohan Singh Josh and his compatriots promptly set up a 'workers' league', but with a difference. This time, greater stress was laid on keeping the declared aims and objectives of the league 'moderate'.[70] Similarly, other activists sought other platforms, or established new ones, in a bid to operate under legal cover.

The most significant of these was the emerging All India Congress Socialist Party (CSP). Founded in the same year that the CPI was banned, the CSP was established by left-leaning Congress activists disenchanted with the promises and direction of Gandhian nationalism. The recent civil disobedience campaign had ended in failure, and the Congress's rhetorical gestures towards socio-economic justice sounded increasingly hollow to many. Much like the reorganized CPI, the genesis of the CSP lay in prison. During the 1932 civil disobedience campaign, some of the leading left-leaning congressmen were jailed in Nashik Road Central Prison, today in Maharashtra, then in Bombay Presidency. Among them were individuals who would become the stalwarts of the socialist movement in India: Jayaprakash Narayan, Ram Manoher Lohia, Acharya Narendra Dev, Minoo R. Masani, and Yousuf Meharally, among others. Despite their varying ideological backgrounds, from Marxism to Fabianism to 'Gandhism', the leaders agreed on the need to establish a progressive caucus within the Congress Party with an aim of

[66] Ibid., pp. 238–244. [67] PPSAI 1934, Simla-E, 8 September, No. 35, p. 372.
[68] PPSAI 1934, Simla-E, 15 September, No. 36, p. 379.
[69] Josh, *My Tryst with Secularism*, p. 200.
[70] PPSAI 1934, Lahore, 17 November, No. 44, pp. 487–478 and PPSAI 1934, Lahore, 1 December, No. 46, pp. 509–510.

nudging the nationalist movement in a more radical and socialist direction. In doing so, they also distanced themselves from the communists. Among their many ideological disagreements, the most significant was the question of internationalism versus nationalism. In giving primacy to the nationalist movement, the CSP chose the latter over the former. It also explicitly distanced itself from the allegedly 'anti-national role of the Communist Party of India'.[71] In so doing, they departed from the CPI's variant of internationalism, which to their socialist detractors meant that the communists primary loyalty lay towards the Communist International.

It is hard to imagine this argument having much impact without the crucial role that Meerut and other platforms had played in casting the communists as 'anti-national'. This was where Meerut had an impact that went far beyond the courtroom. But Meerut would not have such an impact either had sharpening divides in the international communist movement and Stalinization in the Soviet Union not served as a larger backdrop. This was also why 'communism' became increasingly problematic for the socialist camp. For their part, the communists, or the more doctrinaire among them at any rate, viewed the socialist party with barely concealed contempt and hostility. Nor was it acceptable for many to work within the confines of the nationalist movement. That changed with the Popular Front line put forth by the Comintern at its Seventh Congress in 1935. The Popular Front line advocated a united front of progressive and anti-imperialist parties to oppose the rising tide of fascism.[72] Anticipating a shift in communist policy, the CSP lifted the ban on communists on joining its ranks. This was a policy shift that the CSP would soon come to regret. Officially banned communist cadres joined

[71] Sonal Shah, 'Indian Socialists and Their Legacy', *EPW* LI, 43 (October 2016), 22. See also, by the same author, *Indian Socialists: Search for Identity* (1994). For a useful overview of the Congress Socialist Party, see John P. Haithcox, 'Left-Wing Unity and the Indian Nationalist Movement: M.N. Roy and the Congress Socialist Party', *MAS* 3, 1(1969), 17–56. Also see Comintern/F.495/Inv. 16/File 26, M.R. Masani, 'Why I Am a Congress Socialist', pp. 10–14. For the most detailed case for socialism, see Jayaprakash Narayan, *Why Socialism?* (All India Congress Socialist Party, 1936), in which he passionately argues the case for a socialist congress party and for a socialist India. In one of his telling remarks on the distance between socialists and communists, he called for making 'fewer mistakes than the Russians' (p. 57). The Russians, as he put it, had 'great achievements' to their credit, but Indian socialists had to be wise enough to avoid their excesses and mistakes. This statement, it is safe to say, could not possibly have been issued from the communist camp, which continued to regard the Soviet Union as a veritable mecca.

[72] See Jonathan Haslam, 'The Comintern and the Origins of the Popular Front 1934–1935', *The Historical Journal* 22, 3 (1979), 673–691 and Kermit E. McKenzie, *Comintern and World Revolution, 1928–1943: The Shaping of a Doctrine* (Columbia University Press, 1964). The Popular Front line is explained in further detail in Chapter 7.

the CSP on an individual basis while still retaining their separate organizational and political identity as communists. More than the Popular Front line, though, the attempted takeover of the CSP was a means by which communists could operate legally in India while also benefiting from the political capital that came from their ostensible affiliation with the Congress and the nationalist movement.[73]

Everyday politics, then, continued much as it did before. Communists quickly learnt to publicly tailor their rhetoric on 'communism' and 'internationalism' while continuing to organize under these platforms. In line with previous practices, they also learnt to organize for issue-specific platforms.[74] In any case, these fronts largely had the same objectives as the communists, including a few classically ambiguous statements designed to placate the authorities. Thus, progressives were to strive towards 'social justice', 'constructive socialism', and the ingeniously phrased 'modifying human behaviour in order to produce a better type of citizen'.[75] 'Communism' may have been anathema, but leftist politics continued to deepen its roots in India. For their part, the authorities were well aware of this chimerical act, but were constrained by the technically legal status of the platforms the communists operated under.

It is worth digressing a bit here to show how the Left was singled out for special treatment. Consider, for instance, the following excerpt from a police report on an Akali rally in 1934 protesting the Communal Award announced by Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald two years earlier:

> The second Sikh Diwan held at Takhtupura commenced on the 7th of October when about 2500 persons were present. At the first sitting, Giani Makhan Singh was the principal speaker. After condemning the Communal Award and describing the government as being '*be-iman*' [ill-intentioned], the speaker recited a couplet the purport of which was that they should 'pitch the red flags of war, make European ladies widows by killing Englishmen, and enjoy themselves by taking the women to their homes'. The speaker urged his hearers to show the '*nalaiq*' [incompetent] Government that Muslim *Raj* was unacceptable by enlisting under the banner of the Khalsa Darbar.[76]

[73] See Haithcox, 'Left-Wing Unity', pp. 33–36. On the CSP's later politics, and the dilemmas it confronted in the run-up to Partition, see William F. Kuracina, '"Source Silver": An Informant, Collaboration and the Ambiguity of an Indian Socialist Ideal', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 40, 4 (2017), 744–762.

[74] To quote but one instance, the formation of a Punjab *Kisan Qarza* Committee in 1935. Ostensibly founded to influence discussions on the Relief of Indebtedness Bill, the Committee worked to oppose other platforms representing agricultural interests under the leadership of the Akalis and Unionists, PPSAI 1935, Lahore, 9 March, No. 10, pp. 93–94.

[75] Part of the founding objectives of the Punjab CSP, PPSAI 1934, Lahore, 10 November, No. 43, pp. 476–477.

[76] PPSAI 1934, Lahore, October, No. 40, p. 450.

Such rhetoric was *de rigueur* for a charged political climate, yet there is little if any indication whether this speaker, or others, were arrested for sedition. Nor was there any significant move against their parent organizations. While there were many reasons for this apparent inaction, the fact remained that leftist, and specifically communist sedition, was considerably worse than other seditions. It mattered little that speakers like Makhan Singh posed a greater threat to law and order than a potential, and all too distant, communist threat. By its very *nature*, communism was an existential threat.

This was another reason, if any more were needed, why communists were better off working under other platforms. It was also through such platforms that communists could participate in mainstream politics. The clearest indication of that came with the 1937 elections. Held in eleven provinces in the winter of 1936–37, the elections were the largest electoral exercise that had been conducted in India up until that year. The Indian National Congress by and large commanded the elections and managed to form its ministries in eight of the eleven provinces. For the underground CPI, there was the question of whether the elections should be boycotted. The party had earlier decided to agitate against the 'British-imposed' Government of India Act of 1935 under which this electoral exercise was being held, but with the elections approaching, they decided to carry their message to the elected assemblies. Being officially banned, the only recourse the CPI had was to contest the elections on Congress tickets. In the Punjab, seven 'socialists'/'communists' were elected to the Provincial Assembly, including Bibi Raghbir Kaur, the only female communist MLA. Josh was the only communist to contest elections on an independent ticket. It was no coincidence that he ran in the constituency of Tarn Taran. As pointed out in the preceding chapter, Tarn Taran was one of the crucial sites where Ghadarites, Akalis, and Kirtis had been particularly strong. Despite propaganda by his opponent that communists were 'anti-religion', 'apostates', and underserving of Sikh votes, Josh won the election.[77] As ever, then, leftist successes were closely tied to distinct geographies, but the elections also showed how the rhetoric at Meerut and other platforms had seeped down to local politics. These evident setbacks aside, elections proved to be beneficial to Josh and the communist movement in the Punjab. As Josh put it, from merely being a district leader (and, one might add, convicted criminal), he was elevated overnight into an all-Punjab figure of note.

[77] Josh, *My Tryst with Secularism*, p. 212.

Red Dawn

Josh continued his journey as a politician of some renown in the Punjab. He represented the 'Official Group' of the CPI in the province, and was opposed by his erstwhile comrades in the Kirti network, the other 'official' communist group in the Punjab. But these divisions paled in comparison to the deepening division between the communist movement as a whole and other political and ideological camps in British India. While matters were considerably more complicated at the regional and local level, the broader trend across India suggested that the division was deepening. This was especially the case in the Punjab where, as the last chapter point out, irreconcilable differences were cropping up between the Akalis and communist groups. This was a far cry from the 1920s and early 1930s when political alliances and ideological affinities were far from fixed or sharply defined. But this story was not simply driven by politics in India. It was also inextricably tied to shifts elsewhere, most notably in the Soviet Union. With Stalinization came increasing conformity, and the broad alliances that had marked the early 1920s were all but a distant memory. As in the Soviet Union, so too in India, 'communism' became more fixed, more defined, more rigid – and if the mass-scale purges in Soviet Union were any guide, it was also turning on itself. That did not go unnoticed in India either. The sharpening divide and distinction between 'communists', 'socialists', 'nationalists', and others was driven both by national and international shifts.

It is here that the colonial state played a crucial role. In the 1920s, the Raj was faced with the near impossibility of distinguishing 'communism' from other political expressions. Faced with overlapping political grammars, languages, platforms, multiple affiliations, and interlocking relationships between nationalist and internationalist politics, it was difficult to extricate, isolate, and effectively tackle communism. To that end, the colonial state devoted its extensive resources to chasing what seemed like apparitions of its own making. Gradually, however, the executive, legislative, and judicial arms of the Raj managed to craft a political sphere where 'communists' either stood at the margins or existed beyond them. This was where the Meerut Conspiracy Case marked a turning point. Meerut, the trial and the larger moment, succeeded where no other prior attempt had. Its key contribution lay in decisively cleaving the politics of internationalism and nationalism. While there were indications of this during the trial itself, the effects of this increasing split became ever more evident in the years after. The persistent critique of the communists as anti-national, anti-Indian, anti-God, internationalists through Meerut and other state and non-state platforms helped create a political climate

in which these charges became commonplace and commonsensical. To that end, matters were also helped by a communist movement defining itself in ever more restricted ways. Meerut played a significant role in this process too, by creating the conditions through which an 'official' communist group could emerge.[78] 'Communism' may not have been conclusively defeated, but a more internally differentiated, sharpened, and disciplined political sphere did replace the messy, overlapping, and undisciplined politics of the 1920s. The extent to which Meerut and other mechanisms were responsible for this can be debated, but what remained true was that the political sphere became more manageable. Communists could be singled out and isolated more effectively.

Still, irrespective of their increasing distinctiveness and consequent isolation, there were plenty of reasons to be optimistic. The underground CPI, working through other platforms like the CSP, *kisan sabhas*, and workers' leagues, managed to grow, mobilize, and organize. But, as ever, with the most unapologetic of dreamers, there was another source for their seemingly boundless optimism. History was on their side. It was a conviction that was echoed time and again. And no one expressed it better than Josh in his fiery address to the Meerut court. In closing his speech, Josh claimed that the 'dawn of better days' was coming. In an allegory, familiar to poets who spoke of the coming revolution in similar terms, he compared the darkness of their moment with the darkness immediately preceding dawn. He then added:

> The mother has to suffer from the travails before the birth of a child, so we who want to bring into being a new order, shall have to pass through periods of travail before the advent of the red dawn of the new order. Our Cause is just … Time may, by the inexorable laws of nature, come when it will be our turn to have the laugh on our side. In this epoch of revolutions, nothing is impossible under the sun.[79]

Despite bans, proscriptions, crackdowns, and a fractured political landscape, nothing, seemed impossible under the sun. It was this recognition that enabled Josh and his comrades to discern a red dawn even in the darkest of horizons. And how they navigated those horizons amidst a global conflict and impending decolonization is the story of the following chapter.

[78] I make this argument more explicitly in my article 'Separating the Wheat from the Chaff: Meerut and the Creation of "Official" Communism in India', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 33, 3 (2013), pp. 316–330.

[79] MCC Papers, Josh Statement to Court, p. 360.

7 A Dream Deferred

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?
Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.
Or does it explode?[1]

Langston Hughes, *Harlem*

Late in August 1941 a bedraggled, exhausted, and sorely-out-of place traveller was apprehended in Gilgit Agency. Situated in the northernmost reaches of the Raj in some of the highest and most forbidding mountains in the world, bordering both China and the Soviet Union, and at the frontier of one of the most sensitive and surveilled borderlands anywhere, Gilgit was a difficult place for strangers to pass through undetected. Even so, he had been apprehended 'quite by chance'. At first, he claimed to be 'a Muslim'. Pressed further, he readily admitted his true identity – Achhar Singh Chhina, Ghadarite, Kirti, Moscow graduate, and fugitive from (colonial) justice since 1938. Chhina had reached Gilgit through a long and arduous journey that began a month earlier in Moscow. Later interrogated by the Punjab CID after receiving some assurance that his confession would not be made public, Chhina told his interrogators a gripping tale that linked Bengal with Punjab, and both to Kabul, Moscow, and Berlin.[2] His confession spoke of the extraordinary – and bizarre – circumstances placed before the national and international communist movement since the Second World War

[1] Langston Hughes, 'Harlem', in *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes* (Random House Inc., 1990), www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46548/harlem.
[2] IOR/L/P&J/12/218 'Bose Conspiracy Case', letter dated 17 December 1941.

broke out. It also spoke to how the war had completely upended politics in British India.

In his pre-war life, Achhar Singh shared the intellectual and political trajectories of many Ghadarite and Kirti radicals. Born around 1899–1900 in the village of Harse Chhina (or Sheena) in District Amritsar, Achhar Singh had left for the United States in 1921 to study engineering at Berkeley. Instead of studying and repaying the trust – and money – his father had placed in him, Achhar Singh joined Ford as an apprentice in Detroit. There, he met Ghadar activists, read Ghadar literature, and soon emerged as a Ghadar leader of some repute. Later, he moved to San Francisco, where he edited the *Hindustan Ghadar* and supervised the dispatch of Ghadarites to Moscow. In 1932, Achhar Singh himself left for Moscow for a regular two-year 'course'. In 1935, he returned to India armed with newly acquired skills, knowledge, and instructions from the Comintern. Part of his brief was to work for a 'united front' between the Kirti Kisan group, and the Communist Party of India and its Punjabi affiliate led by Sohan Singh Josh. Much like other attempts at unity, this too came to naught. In 1938, Achhar Singh went underground after being charged with murder and rioting. In the next two years, he moved between the Punjab, United Provinces, Bihar, Bengal, and Bombay.

Meanwhile, the Second World War broke out in 1939, sending Indian politics into a tailspin. The war placed crucial questions before the communists, and the Left in general. It also raised the stakes of a united front between the Kirtis, CPI, and other leftist forces. Given the urgency of these questions, and the failure to resolve them, the Kirti Party decided to send its representatives to Moscow to seek the Comintern's views on their attempts at unity and reorganization. Also up for discussion was the Kirti position on the war. This came as a blessing to Achhar Singh, not least because he was still on the run from the police. Asked to accompany Ram Kishen 'B.A. National', another operative of the Kirti Party, Achhar Singh eventually made his way to Kabul by August 1940. Both men waited on the Soviet Legation in Kabul. Told by the Soviets to make their way to the first outpost once they crossed the river Oxus, the comrades left Kabul by lorry and after a lengthy journey involving restive ponies and a hazardous river crossing they crossed the Afghan frontier at Kala Bar Panja, bordering modern-day Tajikistan. It is here that accounts diverge significantly. Kirti histories claim that Ram Kishen drowned while crossing the Oxus. In the statement that Achhar Singh gave to the police, though, the two comrades crossed into Soviet territory where they were picked by up two Russian *sowars* and promptly placed in a lock-up. On being interrogated, they told their captors about their mission and were later sent by plane to Stalinabad – modern-day

Dushanbe, capital of Tajikistan – where they were met by a Comintern operative. Satisfied by their bona fides, both were escorted by train to Moscow.[3]

In Moscow, which they finally reached in October 1940, they submitted lengthy reports to the Comintern. Much like earlier correspondences, their reports offered a laborious analysis of the communist movement in India. For good measure they also provided a rough – and no doubt cooked – description of British aerodromes.[4] They were also interviewed extensively by their Comintern handlers on the prevailing political situation in India and the roles that the Kirtis and the CPI were expected to perform. In the weeks that followed, Ram Kishen fell ill. He was diagnosed with tuberculosis and sent to a sanatorium. That was the last that Achhar Singh saw of him. Meanwhile, Achhar Singh took up a translation job in Moscow, where, among other things, he translated Stalin's 'Foundations of Leninism' into Urdu and Punjabi. He was still in Moscow when the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941. With his offer of joining the Red Army politely rejected, Achhar Singh was told to return bearing fresh instructions to the CPI directing them to support the war effort against Nazi Germany. If the Soviet Union fell, it would be the end of communism as they knew it. Sent back via Stalinabad, Achhar Singh eventually tried to smuggle himself through an arduous journey into British India through Gilgit, where he was finally caught in August 1941.[5]

Achhar Singh's confession also gave the authorities valuable information on Subhas Chandra Bose. As India's most famous wartime leader, enduring nationalist icon, and martyr, 'Netaji's' exploits have inspired much hagiographical commentary.[6] Less known, though, is the role that the Kirtis ostensibly played in Bose's escape from India. Bose, Achhar Singh claimed, approached the Kirti group to facilitate his escape to Afghanistan and eventually to Moscow where he intended to solicit the Soviets' assistance in his struggle against the Raj.[7] Before Achhar Singh could do so, Bose was arrested. Eventually, Bose managed to escape

[3] IOR/L/P&J/12/218 'Bose Conspiracy Case', 'Note based on the Statement of Achhar Singh Cheena', pp. 7–13.
[4] Comintern/F. 495/Inv. 16/File 57a, 'Papers by Ram Kishen on Kirti'.
[5] IOR/L/P&J/12/218 'Bose Conspiracy Case', 'Statement of Cheena', pp. 13–17.
[6] See for example Subhas Chandra Chattopadhyay, *Subhas Chandra Bose: Man, Mission, and Means* (Minervia Associates, 1989); V.S. Patil, *Subhas Chandra Bose: His Contribution to Indian Nationalism* (Sterling Publishers, 1988); and Eric A. Vas, *Subhas Chandra Bose: The Man and His Times* (Lancer Publishers, 2005). For a more measured account, see Sugata Bose, *His Majesty's Opponent: Subhas Chandra Bose and India's Struggle against Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2011).
[7] IOR/L/P&J/12/218, 'Bose Conspiracy Case', 'Summary', p. 14.

from Calcutta to Peshawar, where he was escorted into Kabul in January 1941 by Bhagat Ram Talwar, a member of Bose's Forward Bloc and a Kirti affiliate.

It is here that the next chapter in this extraordinary story starts. Talwar, also known by his code name Silver, arranged Bose's initial contacts with the German and Italian legations in Kabul. More than ever before, wartime Kabul was a centre of espionage and great power rivalry, with the Italians, Germans, Soviets, and the British all running their agents and clandestine offices. Eventually, Bose made his way to Berlin instead of Moscow. This did not come as a surprise to the Kirtis, who had expressed misgivings about Bose's 'fascist sympathies' long before he approached them for assistance.[8] Meanwhile, Bhagat Ram Talwar continued working for Bose and the Germans. He had been recruited by the German Legation with the twin responsibility of spying on British military preparations and working with potential rebels with an aim of sponsoring an insurrection in India. All this while, though, he was also in touch with the Soviet Legation in Kabul. Once war broke out between Germany and the Soviet Union, he became a double agent for the Soviets, reporting on German schemes and feeding them fictitious information. From June 1941 to October 1942, he was regularly paid substantial sums and plied with arms and ammunition by the German Legation, all of which he dutifully took and smuggled across the border to his gleeful Kirti comrades who could scarcely believe their luck. In all, Talwar made six trips between Lahore and Kabul before he was finally arrested in November 1942. Remarkably, Bhagat Ram offered to continue working as a double agent for the Soviets, and, now, the British. As his interrogators remarked, he seemed implacably opposed to fascism and Bose, whom he regarded as a traitor for his fascist sympathies.[9]

That, at any rate, is the story that emerges from the confessional statements of both Talwar and Achhar Singh. To some extent, their statements can be corroborated with other Kirti accounts and by the reports that Achhar Singh submitted to the Comintern. But even if their confessions are treated with caution, their stories still provide an

[8] IOR/L/P&J/12/218, 'Bose Conspiracy Case', 'Bhagat Ram's Story', pp. 1–2. In that, they were arguably more cautious of Bose's ideological leanings than many historians who have tended to gloss over Bose's fascist connections.

[9] His interrogators' far more detailed account can be found in L/P&J/12/218, 'Bose Conspiracy Case', 'Bhagat Ram's Story'. Bhagat Ram Talwar's adventures have also been the subject of a book: Mihir Bose, *Silver: The Spy Who Fooled the Nazis: The Most Remarkable Agent of the Second World War* (Fonthill Media, 2016). On Bose's escape and exploits, see Sugata Bose's *His Majesty's Opponent*, chapters 6, 7, and 8.

extraordinary insight into how their journeys and politics were woven in with larger events and processes. Both stories exemplified how the Second World War proved to be a watershed moment for the Left and the Indian political spectrum at large. This was a moment in which every major political actor in the subcontinent was forced to reassess its political position and tactics. The same was true of the communist party. Internationally, the war spelt the end of the Comintern and the euphoria of interwar internationalism. To Indian communists, it forced open the interrelated questions of internationalism and nationalism. This chapter, then, provides a detailed overview of how communists responded to this crisis. It begins by providing a brief overview of the end of the Communist International and the impact its dissolution had on the communist movement in India. It then examines the responses of the communist movement to the war and the Pakistan movement. The CPI's response to both questions had far-reaching implications for their legitimacy and strength as a political force. It also had a long-lasting impact in terms of how India and Pakistan would view communism. Broadly speaking, then, this period – from the beginning of the war to formal independence – was crucial for defining the political sphere in which the communists would operate. This was a sphere that by 1947 was far removed from the heady days of the 1920s, when decolonization was imagined in starkly different terms. This chapter is as much a story of how a world ended as it is about a political sphere that changed dramatically with the onset of a cataclysmic war and an impending decolonization.

End of an Era

Achhar Singh's trip to Moscow was the last-known direct engagement between Indian communists and the Comintern. Soon after his departure to India, the Comintern was disbanded by Stalin. In a terse statement to constituent communist parties on 15 May 1943, the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) proposed 'To dissolve the Communist International as a guiding centre of the international labor movement, releasing sections of the Communist International from the obligations ensuing from the constitution and decisions of the Congresses of the Communist International.' Though it had long been evident that the Comintern had outlived its purpose, this statement was still highly significant. At one stroke, it marked the passing of an era of utopian promises that had exemplified the interwar period. Noting that it was no longer tenable to solve the problems of the labour movement of each individual country through an international centre, the ECCI argued that 'the deep differences in the historical roads of development

of each country of the world, the diverse character and even the contradiction in their social orders, the difference in the level and rate of their social and political development and finally the difference in the degree of consciousness and organization of the workers', meant that the that the 'organizational form for uniting the workers' (read: Comintern) had 'more and more outlived itself in proportion to the growth of this movement and the increasing complexity of problems in each country'. Indeed, if anything, 'this form even became a hindrance to the further strengthening of the national workers' parties'.[10]

The key word here, of course, was 'difference'. Since its earliest days, questions of historical difference, specificity, and context had bedevilled the Comintern. In its attempts to paper over the question of difference in the name of a common, monolinear future, an intricate and confounding web of theoretically dense justifications was spun by Comintern ideologues. Underpinning that was a belief in a future that was promised for all. Indeed, that is precisely what had attracted many who made their journeys to Moscow. The Comintern's uncompromising pursuit of this line had alienated allies, had stifled communist parties, not least the CPI, and had led to a series of galling strategic debacles, such as the 1927 disaster in China. At one level, then, this statement was an implicit admission, and a damning indictment at that, of previous mistakes. For obvious reasons, though, the ECCI could not be seen acknowledging this. In its place, it merely claimed that the period of the post-First World War rebirth of the labour movement had necessitated the formation of the Communist International for a number of reasons, including the need to preserve 'the teachings of Marxism from vulgarization and distortion by opportunist elements'. Apparently, that purpose had long been achieved. In any case, communists had never 'advocated the preservation of [obsolete] organizational forms' over 'the peculiarities of given historical conditions'. But in a telling reminder of how the ongoing war had forced the Comintern's hand, it added that the 'speediest victory over the enemy can best and most fruitfully be realized by the vanguard of the labor movement of each country *within* the framework of its state'.[11]

Its tortured reasoning aside, there were likely other, and more plausible, reasons for why the Comintern had been disbanded. As Robert Service argues, Stalin's opposition to the Comintern had predated the war. During the Great Terror he had accused the Comintern 'of being hand in glove with the enemy', a charge that had already exacted a heavy

[10] 'Dissolution of the Communist International', www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/dissolution.htm Marxists.org.
[11] Ibid., emphasis added.

toll on the organization. On the eve of Operation Barbarossa, Stalin argued that communist parties had to be 'seen to be independent of Moscow and protective of national interests'. In a radical departure from the heady days of the revolution, 'national tasks' for each country had acquired a greater priority. Post-Operation Barbarossa, Stalin's reasoning might have changed, but he remained undeterred in his decision to abolish the Comintern. In his new line of thinking, he perhaps wanted to assure the Americans and the British that the Soviet project of a world revolution was at an end. More likely, though, he wished to 'maximize communist appeal in the European countries about to be overrun by the Red Army'. It was important for him that each communist party appear to be acting without instructions from Moscow, even if reality was far messier than, and often at odds with, that.[12]

Back in India, the communist leadership was blissfully unaware of Stalin's calculations. Even in the unlikeliest of events of them knowing, the CPI leadership would have still approved of the Comintern's dissolution. Predictably, then, the leading communist organ, *People's War*, breathlessly greeted the ECCI's declaration and 'Premier Stalin's' statement on the dissolution of the Communist International as 'an historic event'. 'In the annals of mankind's freedom movement', it exclaimed, Stalin's statement would rank alongside Lenin's 'memorable call' to the 'freedom loving peoples of the world'. At this critical juncture in the 'destiny of mankind', it added, the dissolution of the Comintern was *'perfectly timely'*.[13] Thanks to the twenty-four years of 'theoretical and practical guidance given by the Leninist–Stalinist International', communist parties 'in every country [knew] their job and [were] doing it very well, indeed'. And in a frank admission of the pressures the CPI had faced in all these years, the *People's War* also claimed that the dissolution of the Comintern would finally lay to rest the 'myth' that Indian communists were agents of Moscow. Coming as it did at a 'decisive turning point in the destiny of mankind', the dissolution was nothing short of a momentous event for India and for the world at large.[14]

While the *People's War* may be read as an official pronouncement that the CPI was compelled to make, there is little to indicate that the Comintern's dissolution dampened communist spirits. Apart from M.N. Roy, this passing of an era provoked little comment in communist publications. Still, a few retained the hope that the Comintern would be

[12] Robert Service, *Comrades! A History of World Communism* (Harvard University Press, 2010), pp. 220–222.
[13] Emphasis in original. [14] *People's War*, Nos 47, 48, 6 June 1943, p. 1.

revived after the war.[15] For many, though, it mattered little whether the Comintern would re-emerge or not. The Soviet Union would remain the ideological and political lodestone for many communists for decades to come.[16] As the home of Communist Internationalism, of utopian promise, the Soviet Union remained the inaugurator of history, the shaper of humankind's destiny. Even if the CPI no longer acted under the orders or guidance of the Comintern, it would continue to be led by the 'scientific principles enunciated by the greatest leaders of mankind – Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin'.[17] To all intents and purposes, then, the dream of Communist Internationalism outlasted the Comintern's dissolution, the war, and Stalin himself.

Imperialist War

Far away from the Soviet Union, the Second World War left an indelible imprint on India. Over the duration of the war, over two million men were mobilized for the British war effort in what counted as the largest volunteer army in history. There were few, if any, spheres in India left untouched by the conflict.[18] Similarly, Indian politics went into a tailspin with the onset of the war. A mere seven weeks later, the Congress resigned from its ministries to protest Lord Linlithgow's decision to unilaterally declare war on Nazi Germany. For its part, the Communist Party fully supported the Congress's decision to boycott the war effort. With the cry of 'not a single sailor, not a soldier from India', the CPI, in pursuance of the Comintern's initial line, characterized the conflict as an 'Imperialist War'. For the Comintern, the responsibility for the war lay on Britain and France as much as it did on fascist Germany. But more strikingly, it claimed that there was 'no distinction whatever between imperialism and fascism'. Somewhat expectedly, the CPI triumphantly claimed that the war had already been predicted by the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in 1935. It seemed there were few, if any, developments that had not been predicted by either the Comintern or Stalin. Similarly, the otherwise inconvenient truth of the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact and the eastward expansion of the Soviet Union into Poland and the Baltics was characterized as a move of checking fascist expansion and

[15] Subodh Roy (ed.), *Communism in India: Unpublished Documents 1935–45*, 'Communist Survey April–June 1943', p. 386.
[16] This continued to be true for many Pakistani and Indian Communists even after the official disavowal of Stalinism by the Soviet Union under Nikita Khrushchev.
[17] Roy (ed.), 'Communist Survey April–June 1943', p. 387.
[18] Most notably documented in Yasmin Khan, *The Raj at War: A People's History of India's Second World War* (Bodley Head, 2015).

preventing the continent from being engulfed by the imperialist war. For India, the question could not be starker or more urgent: indeed, her choice would be 'one of decisive factors in determining the course of history'. To assist the British at this critical juncture would strengthen fascism in Europe and imperialism elsewhere. It was thus the historic task of Indians and other peoples to stridently oppose the war. Should there be any doubt, this policy 'was not conceived in the spirit of narrow nationalism'. Instead, it was a 'truly international policy', and perfectly in sync with the line adopted by the international proletariat led by the Comintern. As such, it fully corresponded with the needs of the Indian people for their liberation. In that sense, this was a 'truly revolutionary and national policy'.[19] Much like previous years, there was no contradiction between the international and national for those committed to the project of Communist Internationalism. Indeed, if anything, the national often came via the International.

Reacting to the lead given by the Congress, the CPI, together with allied organizations and assorted communists, socialists, terrorists, revolutionaries, and run-of-the-mill agitators – with the distinction between them not always clear – intensified their efforts at opposing and disrupting the war effort. Nowhere were the stakes of this activism as high as in the Punjab, the heartland for military recruitment to the British Indian Army. Leading the charge within the Left were the Kirti Party and the provincial communist and socialist parties. Of the three, the Kirti Party was reported to be the most 'dangerous' for the 'great influence' it commanded over the central Punjabi rural population.[20] Much like their Ghadarite forebears, Kirti activists had long agitated against military recruitment and service to the Empire.[21] Many were related to serving and retired soldiers through family, caste, kinship, and village. Through their contacts, Kirti activists frequently smuggled seditious and revolutionary literature into regimental lines. As anti-militarist activities intensified, a Kirti paper, the *Lal Jhanda* – a crude, cyclostyled, and proscribed publication – began to disseminate 'distorted war news and accounts of mutiny by Indian troops'. This was in addition to the usual fare of praise for the Soviet Union and condemnation of British imperialism. Other parties adopted similar tactics. The Kirtis also reportedly managed to create 'cells' within the army. While it is difficult to ascertain the success

[19] Roy (ed.), 'The Communist' Vol. II, No. 1', pp. 111–140 and 'The Second Imperialist War' by Gangadhar Adhikari, pp. 141–154.

[20] PPSAI 1941, Lahore, 5 April, No. 14, 'Supplement: Review of Anti Militarist Propaganda for Period May to October 1940', p. 9.

[21] See Chapter 1. Also see NAI/11/18/1932/POL, 'Propaganda by the Ghadar Party among Sikh Regiments and Sepoys in Villages'.

of these schemes, they were nevertheless a source of considerable anxiety for the authorities, not least because in a few cases Kirti and revolutionary activists did manage to 'subvert the loyalty' of serving Sikh troops. To mention the most famous instance, 'large-scale desertions' were reported from the Sikh Central India Horse stationed in Egypt. These desertions, coupled with 'mutinous behaviour' within the unit and elsewhere, were held to be the direct outcome of the 'insidious influences and pernicious preachings' of the Kirti group.[22] Moreover, in making use of the pressing requirement for military recruits a few 'subversive elements' also succeeded in joining the British Indian Army. For those reasons, provincial intelligence regularly reported on the 'anti-militarist' activities of these groups and fluctuating numbers of recruits over the duration of the war. Nor could the colonial state and provincial government have taken these feeble attempts lying down. Any efforts at undermining the war effort could not be tolerated. Thus, thousands of leftists were incarcerated across the country under the Defence of India Rules on the charges of spreading 'disaffection', 'sedition', and opposing the war effort. These individuals were in addition to the tens of thousands of Congress activists arrested during the war.

People's War

All that changed, however, with the invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. For comrades accustomed to one 'decisive turning point' after another, Operation Barbarossa truly marked a monumentally decisive moment for the communists. The conflict was no longer an 'Imperialist War'. The crisis was imminent, urgent, unprecedented, and it was felt by communist parties around the world. For Indian communists, and others, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the victory of fascism would not only spell the defeat of socialism – it would also spell the defeat of national liberation struggles around the world.[23] Finding itself at a crossroads with no precedent in its short and difficult history, the Communist Party in India was faced with the impossible question of whether it should prioritize its fight against fascism over its fight against imperialism. In other words, the party had to choose between internationalism and nationalism. Would it support the Soviet Union and the war against fascism if it meant that

[22] Roy (ed.), 'A Note Outlining Kirti Agitation in the Punjab and the Kirti Lehri Group Meerut in Relation to the Communist Movement in India, 1940', pp. 229–230. Also see Supplement, pp. 11–13.

[23] Roy (ed.), Party Letter No. 55, 'Our New Party Line – British Comrades Correct Us!', pp. 269–278.

it would have to support its arch-enemy, British imperialism? And that too at a time when the Congress had not only refused to support the war effort but was on the verge of launching its largest mass agitation against the Raj?

For many communists, the answer was far from unequivocal. Elsewhere, and particularly in Britain and France, it was far more straightforward. Having long been pilloried for sticking to the 'Imperialist War' line, British and French communists could finally and unequivocally support the war in line with popular sentiment.[24] The new line coming from the Comintern directed affiliated communist parties to resist Nazi fascism at all costs. The 'Imperialist War' was now a 'People's War'. For the communist movement in India, though, matters were more complicated. With much of its rank and file in jail and remaining comrades underground, it was difficult to formulate an immediate response to the dramatically changed situation. Some even experienced a crisis of faith and questioned whether the once invincible Red Army would succumb to the seemingly unstoppable Nazi onslaught.[25] Reliant on patchy information from assorted press clippings and smuggled reports from comrades outside, the incarcerated leadership initially acknowledged the significance of Operation Barbarossa and the new Anglo-Soviet alliance without fully realizing its consequences. For that reason, it continued to vacillate on the question of supporting the British war effort. For many, communists could continue supporting the Soviets while opposing or hindering the British war effort.[26] The full import of the Anglo-Soviet agreement became clear to the communist leadership after they received the CPGB's and the Comintern's detailed exposition of what was expected of communists the world over.[27] In a party letter titled 'Our New Line on War – British Comrades Correct Us!' the communist leadership thoroughly criticized itself for pursuing a 'completely wrong political line on the supreme issues [*sic*] before all mankind'. The party leadership admitted to being misled by theories that were a 'product of (their) own bourgeois nationalism' rather than the principles of 'proletarian internationalism' espoused by Marx and Lenin. Hitler, Churchill, and Roosevelt could no longer be treated on the same footing. The first was the 'treacherous enemy of the Soviet Union, and therefore of mankind'. The other two, 'though imperialist, were friends and allies of the Soviet Union'.[28] It had taken nearly six months to arrive at this

[24] Service, *Comrades!*, pp. 215–217. [25] Josh, *My Tryst with Secularism*, p. 243.
[26] Roy (ed.), 'Memorandum 10th January 1942', p. 252.
[27] The CPGB had long acted as an intermediary between the Comintern and the CPI.
[28] Roy (ed.), 'British Comrades Correct Us!', pp. 269–278.

conclusion, but there was no longer any question about the fact that fascism was now a far greater enemy than imperialism. People's War and proletarian internationalism demanded nothing less than the unconditional support of the British war effort in India and elsewhere.

By any measure, this was a momentous decision. It was also an unavoidable decision. Few communists had any doubt about the existential threat posed by fascism. They knew what a victory for fascism would mean for them. More than the defeat of the Soviet Union and the end of the socialist project they had all worked for, the fact remained that India too was directly threatened by the fascist onslaught. There was a distinct possibility that the Nazis might be able to smash their way through Central Asia to India. More realistically, war with Japan was increasingly imminent. After the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 and the quick conquest of South East Asia and later Burma, there was little doubt that India was directly threatened by Japanese expansionism. Any doubts that may have remained were quickly dispelled by the Japanese bombing of Calcutta.

For all their protestations that there was still no contradiction between the two, communists had conclusively chosen internationalism over nationalism, if what counted for 'nationalism' was defined by the Congress. Throughout their history, they had been fiercely critical of the Congress and its methods, but never had the break between the two been as complete as the break that came with the People's War shift. For the Congress and socialists, the People's War line was definitive proof, if any more were needed, that Indian communists were mere lackeys of the Soviet Union. Called traitors, stooges, and agents of *both* the British and the Russians, communists found themselves politically shunned and increasingly isolated.[29] Within their ranks, as colonial intelligence reported, they alienated those who were inspired more by their 'hatred of England than by the love of the Soviet' and driven more by their dream of immediate liberation and revolution than the 'millennium that may follow it'.[30]

For an embattled imperial government in India, though, the communist U-turn was a welcome development. Given the circumstances, the necessity for 'accepting help from anyone genuinely anxious to support the war, be he Communist, Socialist, or anyone else', was broadly recognized.[31] And yet, given their subversive history, the government was cautious in taking the communists' shift at face value. It was

[29] Josh, *My Tryst with Secularism*, p. 279.
[30] Roy (ed.), 'Memorandum 10th January 1942', p. 253.
[31] Roy (ed.), Extract from 'Note dated 8/12/41 from Deputy Director IB to Director, IB …', p. 239.

understood by many within the Home Department that most individuals within the CPI paid only 'lip service to the tenets for Communism as a mode of life'. Instead, they were far more enamoured of 'the mechanics of revolution in general and the technique of the Russian revolution in particular'. They were thus, 'terrorists first and communists second'.[32] On the other hand, there was no doubt that a significant number of 'genuine' communists were sincere in their support to the British war effort. To ascertain their seriousness, colonial intelligence even went to the extent of arranging direct interviews with Puran Chand Joshi, the first and only General Secretary of the CPI in pre-Partition India.[33] Suffice to say, the thought of the government parleying with communists would have been unimaginable to both. Few instances were as indicative of the bizarre circumstances the war had placed before both parties than this episode. Despite their misgivings, then, the government made a few strategic interventions to see this policy through. For instance, 'converted' leftists were placed in detention centres in the hope that they would be able to push the 'People's War' line to their incarcerated comrades.[34] Moreover, a policy of select releases was also adopted. Every case was examined separately to ensure that the 'rebel' in question could be converted into a 'useful citizen'. If anything, such individuals were deemed to be far less of a danger than the average Congressman who was held to have 'the heart of a defeatist or a Quisling'.[35] Far more significantly, however, the ban on the CPI was removed in July 1942 to allow the party to throw its full organizational weight behind the war effort.[36]

The central government's policy shift received a mixed reception elsewhere in India, and particularly in the Punjab, where the provincial government had tirelessly cracked down on communists, socialists, revolutionaries, and agitators of varying descriptions. As a first step, the Punjab government had reluctantly released prominent communists in May 1942, including Achhar Singh Chhina, Teja Singh Swatantar, Iqbal Singh Hundal, Sohan Singh Josh, and Feroze-ud-Din Mansur.[37] Although the men were still subject to close observation after their release, the provincial government quickly reached the conclusion that communists had a marginal utility. For one, their pro-war propaganda

[32] Roy (ed.), 'Policy towards the Communist Party of India', p. 343.
[33] Roy (ed.), 'Notes on Interview with Mr. P.C. Joshi 12-5-1942', pp. 375–379.
[34] An excellent example of which was the placement of Achhar Singh Chinna at the Deoli detention camp. See for instance Roy (ed.), 'Extract from Note dated 8/12/41 from Deputy Director IB to Director, IB …', pp. 236–239.
[35] Roy (ed.), 'Policy towards the Communist Party of India', p. 351. [36] Ibid., p. 348.
[37] Roy (ed.), 'Reports from the IB Regarding the Political Situation and Communism in India 1941–42 7/5/1942', p. 338.

still came with its characteristically 'natural anti-British bias', until it often became quite objectionable. Moreover, the released activists were concentrating their energies on reorganizing the provincial party in preparation for the post-war period. Still, it was difficult to question their sincerity in wanting to see an end to the fascist powers. By way of evidence, communists had refused to participate in Congress activities and had actively condemned attempts at sabotage, strikes, and any other activity that might interfere with the war effort.[38] On balance, therefore, communists were of some use, but only just, for this view was not shared further down the line. The Deputy Commissioner for Lahore, for instance, found the release of these individuals and the Punjab Government's policy 'quite incomprehensible'. If anything, he argued, leniency towards an opponent would be interpreted as a sign of weakness and would only add to the worries of district officers charged with the maintenance of law and order.[39] But his concerns were of little use given the urgency of the moment. After all, there was a wave of 'defeatism' in the country following a quick succession of demoralizing Allied defeats in South East Asia.[40]

Meanwhile, another significant development had taken place within communist ranks. Amid their deliberations over the People's War shift, communists were also moving towards forming the united front that Achhar Singh Chhina had gone to Moscow for. More than his instructions from the Comintern for unity between the Kirtis and the CPI, however, it was the experience of collective incarceration that brought former enemies together. If jails could be 'universities' for communists, they could also be sites where disagreements were resolved and unity forged. Incarcerated in Deoli, a detention camp near Ajmer in Rajhasthan, Ghadar and Kirti activists met the who's who of the communist movement in India, including B.T. Ranadive, S.A. Dange, S.V. Ghate, Z.A. Ahmed, and so on.[41] Incarcerated for nearly two years, the two to three hundred leftists in Deoli had the luxury of discussing their disagreements and moving towards a merger. Such an opportunity had never presented itself in the years when they were underground and banned from operating openly. Barring the socialists led by Jayaprakash Narayan,

[38] NDC S-361, 'Punjab Government Policy Regarding Communists', 'Letter from F.C. Bourne', pp. 1f.
[39] NDC S-361, 'Punjab Government Policy Regarding Communists', 'Letter from Cuthbert King, Commissioner, Lahore Division', 5 May 1943, pp. 1–2.
[40] NDC S-361, 'Punjab Government Policy Regarding Communists', 'Letter from F.C. Bourne to All Deputy Commissioners in the Punjab', 4 May 1943, p. 1.
[41] Josh, *My Tryst with Secularism*, pp. 238–241 and Dhoot, *The Political Memoirs*, pp. 212–217.

the communists agreed upon a merger at Deoli in 1941/42, which marked the first time there had been a united communist party in the Punjab.[42]

For their part, the ever-recalcitrant comrades gave the government ample reasons to doubt the wisdom of their policy. Free for the first time to openly conduct their activities under the banner of the Communist Party, many individuals saw government 'leniency' as an excellent opportunity to consolidate their politics, which had suffered enormously because of relentless state persecution. Thus, remonstrations against imperialist injustices and calls for an independent workers' and peasants' republic continued unabated. More strikingly, perhaps, there had hardly ever been a moment when the Soviet Union was so publicly lauded, celebrated, and mythologized than these years. Communist rallies and public conferences openly pledged their undying fealty to the Soviet Union and to the cause of Communist Internationalism. Meanwhile, the party took out a special English weekly, the *People's War*, with editions in Marathi, Hindi, Gujrati, and Urdu. Edited by P.C. Joshi, the *People's War* served as the party's flagship organ. It carried news and commentaries on national struggles, workers' and peasants' movements, and breathlessly reported the course of the war and the Soviet Union's heroic role in it. As the paper's first editorial in July 1942 claimed, the USSR was an 'incomparable leader' of the peoples of the world. And it was on the USSR's shoulders alone that a promise of a new world rested.[43] Meanwhile, on the other side of the fence, it must have been a strange and infuriating sight for colonial officials to see their erstwhile enemies openly proclaiming their revolutionary message in towns and hamlets across India.

Still, the communists had to strike a careful balance. While the *People's War*'s triumphalist tone may have indicated otherwise, the truth was that the party was finding it increasingly difficult to navigate a very tricky political position. With their dramatic turnaround, they had effectively split from the Congress and the Congress Socialist Party. Now, more than ever before, the line between 'socialists' and 'communists' was clear and distinct. For all the freedom it got from state persecution, it was impossible for the Party to ignore its increasingly isolated position. For those reasons, it continued to support the Congress on some positions. It also agitated for the unconditional release of

[42] Also see NDC, S-425, 'Fortnightly Reports on Situation in Punjab by the Chief Secretary, Punjab Government, 1941', 'Report on the Situation in the Punjab for the first half of August 1941', p. 3.
[43] *People's War*, No. 1, 5 July 1942.

Congress and socialist political prisoners, all this while the Party continued to hold out the hope that the Congress would come around to *its* positions. It was also difficult for communist cadres to suddenly back the war effort after having spent the past few years mobilizing against it. Nor was it possible for many within the rank and file to easily accept party diktats, not least because they had spent a lifetime rebelling against the Raj. It was one thing to rally under the flag of Communist Internationalism, but quite another to suddenly forget personal sacrifices and long-held enmities. As far as many were concerned, it was impossible to make headway with the 'masses' unless they diluted 'their war Gospel with attacks on the British Government'.[44] Indeed, quite a few were persuaded to fall in line by bullish assurances and fantastical promises, including one to the effect that 'by joining the war effort, Communists would be able to penetrate the Army and key industries in large numbers, and thereby strengthen their position for an ultimate struggle against British Imperialism'.[45]

Land of the Pure

Still, the 'People's War' was a considerably less thorny subject than the question of Pakistan. By the 1940s the Muslim League could not be ignored as a political force. The key moment came in the League's call for the formation of Muslim majority 'independent states' in its landmark Lahore Resolution, passed in March 1940. Anxious at the prospect of a seemingly unbridgeable gulf between the Congress and the Muslim League over the question of Pakistan, the Communist Party of India proposed what it viewed as a just and equitable solution. In the pamphlet *Pakistan and National Unity*, Gangadhar Adhikari, the CPI's theoretician-in-chief, spelt out what this solution could be.

For Adhikari and the CPI, the crisis facing India at this critical juncture was the lack of national unity. A National United Front, in the CPI's line of thinking, was what was required to meet the inseparably intertwined objectives of winning freedom and defeating fascism. In 1941 and 1942, with the Soviet Union under attack and a seemingly inexorable Japanese tide engulfing South East Asia and Burma, the question of India's defence was paramount for all political players. For the CPI, it was only a matter of time before the 'Motherland' would need its 'sons' to defend it from

[44] Lionel Carter (ed.), *Punjab Politics, 1940–43: Strains of War* (*Governors Fortnightly Reports and Other Key Documents*), 'Document No. 110, Glancy to Linlithgow, June 10th 1942' (Manohar, 2005), p. 310.
[45] PPSAI 1942, Supplement, Lahore, 2 May, No. 18, p. 233.

the 'pitiless and powerful' Japanese fascists.[46] At this perilous hour, Indians could ill afford to get divided on the question of Pakistan.

The way out of this impasse, Adhikari argued, was for the Congress to recognize the Muslim League's demand for self-determination. Relying on Stalin's thesis on the National Question,[47] Adhikari argued that the demand for Pakistan was principled and just. His report was adopted by the CPI, and a resolution 'On Pakistan and National Unity' was passed by the Central Committee of the CPI in September 1942 and later confirmed by the First Congress of the party in May 1943. After recognizing the necessity of a 'united national front of the peoples of the various communities and nationalities that inhabit India for the defence and freedom of our country', the resolution noted:

> Every section of the Indian people which has a contiguous territory as its homeland, common historical tradition, common language, culture, psychological makeup and common economic life would be recognized as a distinct nationality with the right to exist as an autonomous state within the free Indian union or federation and will have the right to secede from it if it may so desire. This means that the territories which are homelands of such nationalities and which today are split up by the artificial boundaries of the present British provinces and of the so-called 'Indian states' would be re-united and restored to them in free India. Thus, free India would be federation or union of autonomous states of the various nationalities such as the Pathans, Western Punjabis (dominantly Muslims), Sikhs, Sindhis, Hindustanis, Rajasthanis, Gujaratis, Bengalis, Assamese, Biharis, Oriyas, Andhras, Tamils, Karnatakis, Maharashtrians, Malayalees, etc.
>
> … Such a declaration of rights in as much as it concedes to every nationality as defined above, and therefore, to nationalities having Muslim faith, the right of autonomous state existence and of secession, can form the basis for unity between the National Congress and the League. For this would give to the Muslims where ever they are in an overwhelming majority in a contiguous territory which is their homeland, the right to form their autonomous states and even to separate if they so desire … Such a declaration therefore concedes the just essence of the Pakistan demand and has nothing in common with the separatist theory of dividing India into two nations on the basis of religion.[48]

These two passages are perhaps the most well-known sections in the resolution. Less recognized, though, is the qualifier that followed: 'But the recognition of the right of separation in this form need not necessarily lead to actual separation.' Instead, the CPI hoped that a recognition of

[46] Adhikari, *Pakistan and National Unity*, 'Work for Congress – League Agreement (Manifesto of the Communist Party of India for Unity Week, Nov 1–7, 1942)' (People's Publishing House, 1942).
[47] Ibid., pp. 30–34. Also see Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question* (1913).
[48] Adhikari, *Pakistan and National Unity*, pp. 14–15.

the League's demand and the *principle* of secession could help in dispelling 'mutual suspicions' and 'lay the basis for a greater unity in the free India of tomorrow'. 'Congress–League Unity', the resolution declared, was 'the only path of national salvation for our Motherland in the hour of her gravest peril.'[49]

Such 'hours' had come before. Over the years, communist pronouncements had regularly spoken of one 'peril' after another, each presumably graver than the previous one. But this was different. If this resolution and its theoretical underpinnings are any guide, this truly was a moment of crisis for the CPI. The party had to balance its internationalist commitments with its national-level concerns. Much like the People's War line, the CPI's support for the principle of self-determination was a dramatic shift. It certainly was a far cry from previous years when the Left took a dim view of the League's politics. So what had changed? According to Adhikari, the League had 'undergone a transformation' since 1938 when it accepted the complete independence of India as its goal. It was 'no longer feudal reactionary, no longer just a willing tool of imperialism'. Meanwhile, its widespread appeal was attributable to 'the growing anti-imperialist upsurge among the Muslim masses'. The onus of recognizing this fact lay on the Congress. Instead of dismissing the League's appeal as obscurantism and fanaticism, it was the 'historic responsibility' of the Congress to concede the right of national self-determination to each nation in India. As it was, 'the conception of India's unity was never a static one'.[50] And lest there was any doubt that this could be a workable arrangement, there was always the 'shining example' of the Soviet Union at hand, where a 'model solution' to the 'problem of nationalities' had been crafted for its two hundred or so nationalities.[51] As ever, Soviet history was both a template and a progenitor for world history.

Its detailed and often convoluted reasoning aside, the CPI's glowing endorsement of the League's demand was a classic attempt of working backwards and making theory fit reality, a manoeuvre that would not have been entirely unfamiliar to the communist leadership. To pre-empt those criticisms, Adhikari claimed his thesis was 'not a question of mechanically applying rigid pre-convinced notions to actual life'. From this revealing disclaimer, Adhikari worked through one 'nationality' after another in seeking to establish why each deserved the right of self-determination, or, as he proclaimed in one instance with a confidence that betrayed his insecurity, 'this is why *we* grant the right of self-determination to this … nationality'.[52]

[49] Ibid., pp. 15–16. [50] Ibid., pp. 5–7. [51] Ibid., p. 34.
[52] Ibid., pp. 44–45, emphasis added.

It is, however, too easy to pick holes in Adhikari's argument and too easy to accuse the CPI of wilfully ignoring and simplifying complicated and entangled histories. That is not my purpose here. Instead, it is worth remarking on how the CPI's position was, borne out of the impossible circumstances it found itself in. Principally concerned with the intertwined questions of fighting fascism and imperialism, the CPI could only recognize the *fait accompli* that had been presented to Indian politics, irrespective of what its *post hoc* theoretical gloss claimed. The Hindu–Muslim divide *was* real. The Muslim League *was* a reality. 'Pakistan' *had* a widespread and an ever-increasing appeal. And with Congress implacably opposed to both, perhaps the best the CPI could do was to make a reasoned argument consistent with its worldview that could potentially bridge the gulf in Indian politics and lend the party some weight in All India politics.

A Shrinking Space

Nowhere in India were the stakes of these policies greater than in the Punjab. In a heady mix of optimism and desperation characteristic of the Left, the provincial unit of the CPI was instructed to popularize the People's War and United Front line. More damagingly, communist cadres were instructed to lend their support to the Muslim League and the demand for Pakistan. And so, aside from regular organizational work like establishing 'secret cells' and conducting regular propaganda work, assorted 'unity weeks' were also organized in which communist workers rallied, marched, canvassed, lobbied, and toured on cycles carrying Congress, League, and Communist flags.[53] Frequently, the Communist Party and the Muslim League also shared public platforms in which demands for Pakistan went hand in hand with protests against food shortages and the economic difficulties of a wartime economy.[54] Most significantly, however, the Party pushed its Muslim members and other 'progressive' Muslims to join the League. With this step, the CPI hoped to extend its influence among 'the Muslims masses'. To that end, it had already launched the *Qaumi Jang*, the Urdu edition of *People's War*. But more to the point, the Party hoped to form a 'progressive bloc' within the League that would overpower and eventually expel 'reactionary elements' who were irreconcilably opposed to the Congress. The

[53] See for example PPSAI 1942, 'Extract from the Summary of Communist and other Subversive Activities for the fortnight ending the 15th October' (henceforth referred to as 'Extract'), Lahore, p. 655, and PPSAI 1942, Lahore, 7 November, No. 45, p. 696.

[54] PPSAI 1943, Simla-E, 11 September, No. 37, p. 508; PPSAI 1943, Extract, Lahore, 15 January, p. 39 and PPSAI 1943, Lahore, 9 October, No. 41, p. 562.

hope was that the League would then be able to play a more proactive role than it had played thus far in pursuance of 'national unity'.[55]

If such tactics smacked of desperation, it was because they *were* desperate. Ironically, the CPI had never been as politically isolated as it was when the ban on it was lifted. Free for the first time to conduct its politics in the open, the party found itself up against the Congress, League, and the Akalis. With the Muslim League, the Party's relationship had never quite been frictionless. Indeed, if the fervent, proselytizing and desperate tone of the *People's War* editorials are any guide, it had been clear very early on that the CPI's appeals to the League for unity were failing to have much of an impact.[56] For its part, the League clearly had other priorities than being swayed by a relatively minor political force. Simply put, given its increase in popularity, the League did not necessarily need communist support. But more than that, the League had long been suspicious of the Party a point that was driven home by Jinnah's warning to leaguers to have nothing to do with communists. The example was set by Jinnah himself when he gave short shrift to a delegation from the Punjab communist group offering him their unconditional support in unseating the ruling ministry.[57] Irrespective of their strong support, propaganda in favour of Pakistan, and even setting up League branches with their own workers, the CPI was nevertheless reportedly regarded by many leaguers as merely a 'Hindu Party' with sensible views on Pakistan.[58] For their part, the communists had not done much to inspire confidence in the League either. The party's clumsy attempts at infiltrating the League's ranks led to further rifts, in much the same way as it had with the Congress and the Congress Socialist Party earlier.

The Congress rank and file, though, had better reasons for distrusting communists. The CPI's People's War and Pakistan lines were viewed as an egregious betrayal by the Congress and Congress Socialists. The fact that they came during the Quit India movement made matters considerably worse. Amid the largest mass agitation to rock the Raj, the CPI's support of the war effort and criticism of the Congress's intransigence and agitation only confirmed the suspicions of many that the party was merely a Soviet fifth column. In short, its primary loyalties were not to India. Support for Pakistan marked yet another, and immeasurably worse, betrayal than the 'People's War' line. In the charged atmosphere

[55] PPSAI 1943, Simla-E, 11 September, No. 37, p. 582; PPSAI 1943, Lahore, 9 October, No. 41, p. 562.
[56] See for example *People's War* No. 29, 24 January 1943 and No. 41, 15 April 1943.
[57] PPSAI 1944, Extract, Lahore, 13 April, p. 217.
[58] PPSAI 1943, Extract, Lahore, 2 October, p. 581.

of the 1940s, 'Pakistan' as a means of 'national unity' was far too convoluted, fanciful, and divisive an argument to make for the Congress, especially at a time when its entire leadership, together with tens and thousands of workers, were either in jail or underground. Nor was it easy for the communists to live with the charge of disloyalty given that the Congress was by now the sole arbiter of nationalism and patriotism. Any socio-political expression deviating from the Congress's version of nationalism was considered irredeemably anti-national or communal.

Indeed, there was some dissent within communist ranks that fully recognized the self-defeating implications of the Party's impossible political positioning. But, constrained by party discipline, they were left with little option except for half-heartedly following Bombay's dictates. The party's politically suicidal policy was most evident to those working in Sikh heartlands. There, the demand for Pakistan was complete anathema. Virtually all sections of Sikh opinion, led by the Akalis, were implacably opposed to the Pakistan scheme. Amid thundering denunciations of the League and threats of violent confrontation, counter proposals of a separate Sikh homeland were floated. Essentially turning the League's argument against it, the premise of these proposals was simple: with their distinct culture, religion, and history, Sikhs too were a nation and hence entitled to their separate state. If Pakistan became a reality, they would not be forced to live under a Muslim Raj any more than Muslims would be forced to live under a Hindu Raj.[59] The Party's Bombay high command had clearly underestimated the strength of Sikh opposition to Pakistan. When pressed by Punjabi workers on how they could reconcile their policy with Sikh opposition, a flustered Adhikari could only propose increasing sales of party literature as the most effective means of winning public support for the party and its policy. Sensing the hopelessness of its position, the best the party could do was to lend its belated support to *both* Pakistan and Khalistan as a response to Sikh schemes of either Akhand Hindustan or Azad Punjab.[60] This argument for a Sikh state was later concretely spelt out in a pamphlet, *Sikh Homeland through Hindu Muslim and Sikh Unity* – better described as a lengthy rejoinder to the Akalis – issued by theoretician-in-chief Adhikari on the eve of the 1945/46 elections. Adhikari's Sikh state was to be established in the Sikhs' central Punjabi heartland, which allegedly

[59] For a summation of these arguments, together with their lengthy justifications, see Saadhu Swarup Singh, *The Sikhs Demand Their Homeland* (1946) and Harnam Singh, *Punjab: Homeland of the Sikhs* (1945).

[60] PPSAI 1944, Simla, 5 August, No. 32, p. 442 and PPSAI 1944, Simla-E, 17 June, No. 25, p. 340.

had a 'cultural unity' forged by centuries of rich Sikh history.[61] Adhikari's plan envisaged a tripartite division of the Punjab, with a Hindi-speaking East acceding to India, a central Punjabi non-Muslim zone, and a Muslim-dominated West Punjab with Amritsar and Lahore as their respective capitals.[62] In some ways, this was perhaps the only logical outcome of the communist – and League – argument. Nor were they only ones making such arguments, as the appeals for 'Achhutistan' – meant as a homeland for Dalits – aptly indicated.

Predictably, these desperate contortions in policy could never make up for the political ground that had been lost, especially within Sikh constituencies. Six years was a long time in politics and communists had indeed come a long way. When war broke out in 1939, all sections of the Left were implacably opposed to the Akalis for their allegedly 'pro-imperialist' sympathies. For its part, the Akali leadership had been placed in a very difficult position by the war. Recognizing that Sikh political clout was directly tied to their military service, the Akalis could ill afford to follow the Congress's opposition to the war.[63] For the Left, and especially the communists, the Akalis' 'opportunism' only underlined their reactionary, communal, and pro-imperialist politics, a far cry indeed from the heady 1920s when the Akalis rebelled against British authority. But with the People's War and Pakistan line, the boot was

[61] Gangadhar Adhikari, *Sikh Homeland through Hindu–Muslim–Sikh Unity* (Sharaf Athar Ali, 1945), p. 5.

[62] Ibid., pp. 8–9. Ironically, that is exactly what happened after the Partition of British Punjab and later reorganization of Indian Punjab.

[63] Suffice to say, the Akali Dal had been placed in an impossible situation. As an ally and nominal part of the Congress, the Akalis were under considerable pressure to follow the Congress's position *vis à vis* the war. It was not merely the fact that the central Punjabi Sikh heartland had for generations been reliant on military recruitment. The war had placed another predicament before the Akali leadership, which came out in a very public spat between Master Tara Singh, leader of the Akali Party, and Gandhi. Pleading his case for enlisting Sikhs to the Army, Tara Singh wrote that it was 'impossible to ignore the reality of war'. Even if the Congress embarked on civil disobedience, he argued, 'it should do nothing to prevent recruitment to the Army'. Given their relatively low population, it was only through mass recruitment that the Sikhs could 'maintain their position in any Government'. In reply, Gandhi accused Tara Singh of believing in the 'rule of the sword' and having 'my community' [Sikhs] in mind' all the time. As far as he was concerned, Tara Singh and the Congress had 'nothing in common' with each other. Pushed into a corner, Tara Singh declared that if it came to a choice between Swaraj and the Army, he would choose the Army. He followed that with his resignation from the Congress. Meanwhile, other Akalis managed to stay within the Congress only very tenuously. The exchange between the two showed how the war was dramatically reshaping the political landscape in British India. It compelled virtually all political actors to position themselves with an eye to securing the best possible deal in future negotiations over the future of British India. For more details about the exchange between Tara Singh and Gandhi, see PPSAI 1941, Supplement 'Sikh Politics', Lahore, 29 March, No. 13, pp. 4–5.

firmly on the other foot. Now, it was the Akali Party attacking the communists' anti-imperialist credentials, with special propaganda parties formed with the express purpose of discrediting communists. Among the many damaging rumours spread were reports that the communists had been released after tendering apologies to the government and promising support for the war effort.[64] In a further twist of the knife, the Akalis also worked to establish a new 'Kisan Committee' since the communist-dominated Punjab Kisan Committee 'no longer represented the anti-imperialist viewpoint of the *kisans*'.[65] For good measure, they were also accused of betraying the economic interests of *kisans*.[66]

The 1945/46 elections made clear where the communists stood in the Punjab and India generally. While still the third-largest All India party, the CPI was virtually wiped out in the Punjab. Given a limited franchise and the charged atmosphere of 1945/46 in which it was clear who the winners of the colonial end game would be, it was unlikely that any third political force could have had any success at all. But the communists' political miscalculations had also cost them dearly. They were opposed by all three of the main political parties in the Punjab: the Muslim League, Congress, and the Akalis. Prior to the elections, Punjabi communists had done their best to salvage anything they could out of a hopeless situation. They had approached other Sikh parties for the formation of a pro-Congress, pro-League, and anti-Unionist political front.[67] They had made overtures to 'progressive' factions within the Akali party in the hope of soliciting some support. They had even tried to contest gurdwara elections through other parties in a bid to counteract the influence of the Akalis.[68] But all their efforts came to naught. Their dismal state was even more ironical given that their chief opponents consistently acknowledged the popularity of the communist programme and discussed ways and means through which their influence in the rural areas could be effectively countered.[69] With their dreams of a united front in India rapidly fading, the party decided to oppose the ruling Unionists, Akalis, and the Hindu Mahasabha on all seats and to support League candidates against all others. The Akalis for their part negotiated

[64] PPSAI 1942, Simla-E, 20 June, No. 25, p. 336.
[65] PPSAI 1942, Simla-E, 8 August, No. 32, p. 458.
[66] PPSAI 1943, Lahore, 18 December, No. 51, p. 732.
[67] PPSAI 1945, Simla-E, 25 August, No. 31, p. 285.
[68] PPSAI 1945, Lahore, 14 April, No. 14, p. 142.
[69] PPSAI 1944, Lahore, 4 November, No. 45, p. 617. A typical method discussed was the formation of 'National Kisan Committee' to counteract the influence of the 'Communist' Punjab Kisan Committee.

with a vengeful Congress to jointly contest seats where prominent communists had been nominated for election.[70] The result was all too predictable. The communists failed to win a single seat in the provincial assembly. They were also nearly wiped out in the gurdwara elections despite Adhikari's promise that a vote for the communists would be a vote 'for winning a Sikh homeland in a free India'.[71]

The 1945/46 elections also confirmed what had long been feared by many. Punjab, and large swathes of North India in general, was implacably divided along the lines of faith and community. Communal enmities had immeasurably reduced whatever little space there had been for leftist politics. The glory days of internationalism seemed like a dim memory. As a rallying cry, religion was more potent than ever before. The Muslim League had stoked religious divisiveness in their grassroots campaigning over the years, as had the Akali Party and the Hindu Mahasabha. The League had asked for votes in the name of *Khuda* (God), *Rasul* (Prophet) and Islam.[72] Rapt audiences were told that 'Islam was in danger' and that it was the duty of all Muslims 'to regard the campaign to obtain Pakistan as a crusade'.[73] To the waverers, stark warnings were issued that Muslims voting against the League would cease to be Muslim, their *nikah*s (marriages) annulled, their burials in Muslim graveyards prohibited.[74] The impact of such rhetoric was clear: in one case, a Muslim voter in Gujrat who mistakenly voted for a Unionist candidate 'was so convinced of his having become a *kafir* (disbeliever) that he has decided to expiate his sin by feeding 40 orphans'.[75]

The Akalis too, resorted to a similarly incendiary rhetoric. Denunciations of a *Muslim Raj*, cries of *Raj Karega Khalsa* (the *Khalsa* shall rule) and impassioned speeches recalling the glorious and militant history of an imperilled Sikh *panth* were part and parcel of mammoth rallies in cities and villages across central Punjab. Given the charged atmosphere, there was little that communists could do, especially when they themselves were under attack by the Akalis, who ran an orchestrated campaign devoted to condemning them as *nastiks* (atheists), which, as a police report later remarked, proved to be their biggest handicap.[76] Not having a credible rejoinder to these accusations, communists were forced to conduct their politics on terms set by the Akalis. In some localities,

[70] PPSAI 1946, Lahore, 2 February, No. 5, p. 54.
[71] Adhikari, *Sikh Homeland through Hindu–Muslim–Sikh Unity*, p. 20.
[72] PPSAI 1946, Lahore, 2 February, No. 5, p. 54.
[73] PPSAI 1946, Lahore, 26 January, No. 4, p. 42.
[74] PPSAI 1945, Lahore, 10 November, No. 42, p. 392.
[75] PPSAI 1946, Lahore, 16 February, No. 7, p. 84.
[76] PPSAI 1944, Lahore, 4 March, No. 10, p. 133.

non-baptized communists were forced to let their beards and hair grow.[77] In others, they resorted to impersonating Akalis by wearing black clothes, hoisting the yellow flag and exhibiting a *Granth Sahib*.[78] In others still, they administered *amrit* to villagers.[79] Given the circumstances, there was little traction in publicly condemning Akalis for their 'corruption', 'opportunism', and 'toadyism'.

Still, the dream was kept alive. Despite the emphasis on faith and community, there were opportunities to introduce a leftist variant in political campaigning. One significant instance was the active involvement of Muslim activists in the campaign for Pakistan. Much like the cry for *Swaraj*, 'Pakistan' too became a concept on which a dizzying array of socio-political aspirations could be projected.[80] Its deliberate vagueness proved quite useful as a recruiting tool and a propaganda tactic. In some ways, its strength lay in its emotive appeal and in its flexibility to incorporate a potentially vast array of imaginations and interpretations. It is here that the Left made its presence felt through the presence of communist stalwarts like Danial Latifi and Mian Iftikharuddin, both of whom defected to the League a year or two prior to the elections. Immediately appointed to high positions within the provincial party, their influence was most notable in the Muslim League's election manifesto. Co-authored by Danial Latifi, the manifesto, according to a police report, bore the 'stamp of Communist ideology'.[81] Among a series of progressive pledges, the manifesto promised the nationalization of key industries and banks, control of private industry, relief from rural indebtedness, abolition of imperial concessions, and a dramatic improvement in living standards and labour conditions.[82] Elsewhere, pamphlets were specifically directed to Muslim peasants and workers warning them against the 'Birlas', 'Dalmiyas', and Hindu capitalists who dominated the Congress.[83] Even former Unionists claimed that the 'Muslim League now truly represented the Muslim masses and was no longer a body of aristocrats, *Khan Bahadurs*, *jagirdars*, and capitalists'.[84]

[77] PPSAI 1944, Lahore, 5 February, No. 6, p. 86.
[78] PPSAI 1945, Lahore, 27 January, No. 4, p. 36.
[79] PPSAI 1945, Simla, 11 August, No. 30, p. 274.
[80] See in particular Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850* (Routledge, 2000), chapter 8 and Venkat Dhulipala, *Creating a New Medina: State Power, Islam, and the Quest for Pakistan in Late Colonial North India* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).
[81] PPSAI 1944, Lahore, 18 November, No. 47, p. 637.
[82] Ibid., p. 641 and *Punjab Muslim League ka Manshoor* (Manifesto of the Punjab Muslim League).
[83] *Congress aur Mazdoor* (Congress and Workers) – Muslim League Pamphlet (n.d.).
[84] PPSAI 1944, Lahore, 21 October, No. 43, p. 595.

Needless to say, such pledges did not go down well with other sections within the League, especially when communist cadres were found inquiring into tenant conditions of large landowning Leaguers and encouraging peasants to press them for implementing the provisions of the party manifesto.[85] Still, these contradictions were not unique to the Muslim League. All mainstream organizations had mixed messages that both reflected the diversity of political opinion within their ranks and addressed various audiences. Bina Das, for instance, spoke of how Congress workers had promised people a *Kisan Mazdoor Raj*.[86] This was where the League's left-driven message was significant, and, despite their obvious concessions to communal division, this message, and the manifesto in particular, provided the League, according to the chief chronicler of the Pakistan Movement Sharif al Mujahid, with a 'direly needed progressive streak'.[87]

That said, it is difficult to know how persuasive the League's progressive agenda was to Muslims in the Punjab and elsewhere. The elections only confirmed the League's spread and dominance. It emerged with the largest share of seats in the Punjab Legislative Assembly, only falling short by a few seats from establishing their government. With a crudely manufactured coalition ministry of Akalis, Congress, and the Unionists in the Punjab and with the breakdown of the Cabinet Mission Plan in the summer of 1946, the League embarked on 'Direct Action'. By now, it was clear to the communists that they had pinned their hopes on the wrong party. P.C. Joshi denounced the League for its insincerity in fighting imperialism, Rajani Palme Dutt condemned it for being undemocratic.[88] In a damning indictment of the confusion sown within communist ranks, Joshi admitted that party members had been misled into thinking that supporting the principle of Muslim self-determination meant unequivocally supporting the League.[89] Two years later, when the horrors of Partition had unfolded, the communist leadership finally came full circle in its assessment of the Muslim League. As a section of the thesis presented to the Second Party Congress of the CPI held in independent India in 1948 commented,

[85] PPSAI 1945, Extract, Lahore, 15 January, p. 27. [86] Das, *A Memoir*, pp. 123–124.
[87] Sharif-al-Mujahid, '1945–46 Elections and Pakistan: Punjab's Pivotal Role', *Journal of Pakistan Vision* 11, 1 (2010), Pakistan Study Centre, University of Punjab, p. 5.
[88] PPSAI 1946, Extract, Simla-E, 15 August, p. 405; PPSAI 1946, Extract, Simla-E, 31 March, p. 171; PPSAI 1946, Extract, Simla-E, 15 April, p. 185; *People's War* V, 5 (4 August 1946), 4.
[89] PPSAI 1946, Extract, Simla-E, 31 May, p. 271.

The leadership of the Muslim League … representing the interests of the Muslim capitalists and landlords, had *always*[90] played a disruptive and anti-national role. The Muslim League leadership capitalizes the backwardness of the Muslim masses and the failure of the National Reformist leadership to draw the Muslim masses into the common struggle.[91]

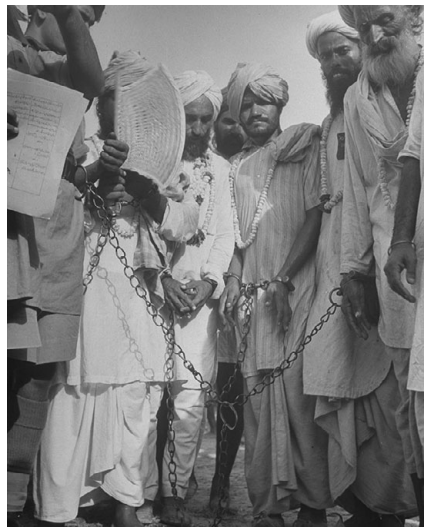
For their political detractors, though, this was a case of too little, too late.

Ashes

The years of 1946 and 1947 are usually known as the years when Punjab went up in flames. Yet, if anxious police reports are guide, these were also years rich with communist and *kisan* agitations. One example is the Harse Chhina agitation in Amritsar district. Running over a few months in the summer and autumn of 1946, the agitation began from the village of Achhar Singh Chhina. Primarily against the remodelling of canal outlets, the Harse Chhina agitation soon spread to surrounding villages. More intriguingly, the agitation also involved the local leaders of the Congress, Akali Dal, and the Muslim League. In the typical fashion of a *morcha* agitation, *jathas* of fifteen protestors courted arrest daily, but they would be led either by Akalis or communists. Sometimes they would even have an Akali, a Congressite, and a Muslim Leaguer within the same *jatha*, each of whom would be bearing the flag of their organizations.[92] In doing so, they were going against their parties and following the lead of the local *kisan* and communist leaders.[93] As ever, then, politics at the local level continued to operate through logics that were frequently removed from political considerations and contestations at the provincial and national level.

Still, these instances of cross-party and cross-communal politics were no match for a Punjab rapidly sliding into chaos. By the turn of the year, the League had embarked on a civil disobedience campaign against the coalition ministry that brought the streets of Punjab to a halt and stretched communal tensions to the limit. Large-scale riots had already taken place in Bengal, Bihar, and the United Provinces. And a few days after the resignation of the Unionist-led coalition, the first of large-scale

[90] My emphasis.
[91] IOR/L/P&J/12/772, 'Communist Activities in India and Pakistan, Jan 1947–Oct 1949' (henceforth referred to as CAIP), Despatch No. 90 (Secret) from Office of the High Commissioner for the United Kingdom, Karachi, 27 March 1948, POL 7416 1948 (henceforth referred to as 'Despatch from Office of HCUK, Karachi'), p. 127.
[92] PPSAI 1946, Simla-E, 27 July, No. 29, p. 366.
[93] PPSAI 1946, Simla-E, 20 July, No. 28, p. 360.



7.1 Achhar Singh Chhina (centre) and others in chains after their arrest during the 1946 Harse Chhina agitation.
Source: Photo by Margaret Bourke-White/The LIFE Picture Collection via Getty Images/Getty Images

massacres broke out in North West Punjab. With the situation rapidly spiralling out of control, communists found their ranks being affected by communal hatred. Already, the Lahore Tonga Drivers Union had been divided when its Muslim members opted to go on strike in support of the League.[94] Similarly, *kisan* leaders felt that they were losing the support of their Muslim workers.[95] Believing, as they always did, that British *agents provocateurs* were behind communal riots, Punjabi leftists struggled to establish peace committees in districts they had a presence in.[96] The more optimistic, and delusional, proposed fantastical schemes to participate in the expected violence, but only to shift from it from a religious to a class-based strife.[97]

[94] PPSAI 1947, Extract, Lahore, 28 February, p. 97.
[95] PPSAI 1947, Lahore, 12 April, No. 15, p. 173; Lahore, 7 June, No. 23, p. 295.
[96] PPSAI 1947, Lahore, 24 May, No. 21, p. 266; also see P.C. Joshi, 'From Punjab, Danger to Us All', in Jyoti Basu (ed.), *Documents of the Communist Movement in India 1944–48*, vol. 5 (National Book Agency, 1997–99), pp. 396–398. Joshi claimed that the riots were sparked by the British to create the conditions for a civil war and the consequent emergence of an India and Pakistan that would be perpetually hostile to one another.
[97] PPSAI 1947, Lahore, 31 May, No. 22, p. 279.

And yet, it is striking how police reporting, even up until Partition itself, was obsessed with communist politics. Amidst unprecedented massacres and forced displacements, intelligence on communist, socialist, labour, *kisan*, and student activism was diligently collected, collated, and reported. In addition, the regular fortnightly 'Summary of communist and other subversive activities' was issued right up until the very eve of Partition. The colonial state may have lost its ability and will to maintain law and order, but its institutionalized obsession with communism and 'subversion' remained intact. Revolutionaries were still suspect, still under surveillance, and still subject to persecution.

Meanwhile, as the 3 June Plan was announced and as Cyril Radcliffe flew in to draw the boundaries of the new states, the confounding reality of Partition quickly began to dawn on communists, much as it did on other political players who found themselves struggling to comprehend and respond to an ever-escalating and changing situation. This confusion also permeated communist ranks and partly led to the endless factional infighting between Teja Singh Swatantar and Sohan Singh Josh finally boiling over. In an alleged violation of party discipline and policy (accounts differ), Swatantar decided to form a 'Pakistan Communist Party', which he claimed was in keeping with the logic, and reality, of Partition. For this, Swatantar was roundly condemned for his action and expelled (not for the first time) from the CPI. More intriguingly, there was an important declaration in the Pakistan Communist Party's founding document that provided a glimpse of how far 'Pakistan' had come in communist thinking. Far from being the fulfilment of Muslim self-determination, the Pakistan on offer was a British creation – and conspiracy. For many communists, *this* Pakistan was an imperialist conspiracy to create a truncated and economically weak state that would serve as a British base against the Soviet Union.[98] Similarly, the PCP's founding charter expressed its determination 'to save Pakistan from [being] a prey to British and American Imperialism and … a Military base directed against Eastern countries struggling for their Independence'.[99] This document was both an implicit admission of defeat and an expression of a clear recognition that the fight against imperialism would long outlast the formal end of empire in India. It was also a coincidentally prophetic insight into the future trajectory of Pakistan as a frontline state in the Cold War.

Teja Singh Swatantar's Pakistan Communist Party only lasted for a few months. It dissolved when Teja Singh, along with his Hindu and Sikh comrades, was forced to leave for East Punjab as the largest forced human

[98] PPSAI 1947, Lahore, 7 June, No. 23, p. 292.
[99] PPSAI 1947, Lahore, 2 August, No. 31, p. 405.

displacement in history got under way. The violence claimed the lives of comrades too. An untold number were forced to migrate in either direction. Some were killed by their coreligionists when they tried to save minority communities. One Gehal Singh Chajjalwadi, was reportedly tortured and killed by Akalis when he tried to save Amritsari Muslims.[100] In other instances, communists were reportedly more successful in saving minority communities, a fact that was also echoed in police and intelligence accounts. According to communist reporting, Muslims were given protection in *kisan*-dominated villages. Here, too, local politics was instrumental. In villages around Bhakna, for instance, the ancestral village of Sohan Singh Bhakna and other revolutionaries, Muslims were reportedly fed and protected under the red banner.[101] This was in stark contrast to villages like Nagoke, ancestral home to the prominent Akali leader Udham Singh Nagoke, where an attack on Muslims within the village became the signal for a general flare-up across the region.[102] In contrast, in 'red' villages, Muslims were reportedly protected until the repeated raids of armed Sikh *jathas* made their situation far too dangerous. In trying circumstances, Sikh *kisans* escorted Muslims to refugee camps, railway stations, and safe villages. In these nightmarish times, instances like the one described by Punjab leftist and Congressite Dhanwantri below, provided a fleeting glimpse of efforts by communists to resist the near ubiquitous violence.

> In village Kharparkheri, Amritsar District, the Sikh kisans had sheltered 900 Muslims. When the situation became too unsafe for them they escorted them to the Amritsar Station to see them safely off. In those days, when armed bands equipped with sten guns, were shooting down Muslims wherever they were seen, it was the most inspiring thing to see those 900 Muslims being escorted by the Sikh kisans who with drawn swords marched on either side of them to keep them safe.[103]

Perhaps it was only the most unrepentant of dreamers who could see a silver lining in the most trying of circumstances.

[100] Reported by Amarjit Singh Chandan and Dhoot, *The Political Memoirs*, p. 242.
[101] Dhanwantri, 'Bleeding Punjab Warns', *Documents of the Communist Movement in India 1944–48*, vol. 5, p. 385.
[102] Ibid., p. 380. The case of Udham Singh Nagoke is particularly interesting as he was closely associated with the 'Left' in the 1920s. More so than Master Tara Singh, he wrote in the *Kirti* and was a regular feature in Kirti Kisan and other leftist conferences. The fact that he later terminated his links with the 'Left' and became a firebrand Akali leader who allegedly orchestrated massacres during Partition was an excellent indication, if any more were needed, of how far the flexible Punjabi and Indian political landscape of the 1920s had come within the space of two decades.
[103] Ibid., p. 386.

A Dream Deferred

Like other leftist recollections, Naina Singh Dhoot's memoir is striking for the way it conceives the self. Naina Singh comes across as a lone, adventurous, self-sacrificing, self-effacing, frequently misunderstood, and ultimately heroic figure who leads the masses in one historic endeavour after another. This Naina Singh leads workers and peasants in their struggles from Jamshedpur and Calcutta in Bengal, to towns and villages in the Punjab. He organizes study circles, strikes, rallies, marches, agitations, and party meetings, settles fractious disputes, shows misled comrades the error of their ways, and instructs, teaches, and guides politically unaware workers and peasants mired in their fatalistic and superstitious beliefs. He is a teacher, mentor, parent, leader, trailblazer all morphed into one. The key to his success is obvious: he has the skills and knowledge worthy of someone trained in Marxism–Leninism. He can argue, reason, cajole, and persuade with the power of reason, scientific rationality, and Marxist truth on his side. There is hardly any instance in Dhoot's retelling when his extraordinary powers did not overcome the forces of irrationality and obscurantism.

All, that is, except one.

The only time when Naina Singh's skills proved worthless was during Partition. He was asked to address an assembly of Hindu and Sikh men who he quickly realized had gathered with the intention of attacking a Muslim *qasba* (locality). Aside from crude weapons, they were carrying hammers, wrenches, tongs, rods, wedges, and anything else that could be of use in breaking chests, cupboards, and boxes. Not knowing how to decline, he reluctantly addressed the gathering. He asked them to consider how their foremost duty in this perilous hour was to protect people on both sides from mass killings and plunder. Both sides, he said, were suffering. He also reminded them that their actions against Muslims would be met by retaliation on their Hindu and Sikh brothers. He gave them other arguments as well. But he soon realized that his pleas were falling on deaf ears. They were intent on attacking the *qasba*, and they did, but they were rebuffed by its Muslim defenders. On their way back, they were caught in the rising waters of a river swollen by monsoon rains. In their rush to escape, he wrote, over 600 of them drowned in the floods of the Bein river.[104]

It is telling that it was only the force of nature that could turn back the forces of obscurantism, fanaticism, and parochialism. Reasoned and

[104] Dhoot, *The Political Memoirs*, pp. 243–244.

rational arguments had failed. All the training that Naina Singh had had could only do so much in a world collapsing under the weight of irreconcilable hatred. Naina Singh's recounting of this episode – which appears only in passing because of his eagerness to emphasize the heroic role the communists played in saving Muslims and rehabilitating refugees – serves as an appropriate metaphor for the passing of one era and the imagined inauguration of another.

Partition marked a moment when dreams came crashing down. It was all a far cry from the heady and euphoric days of the 1920s when a new world seemed imminent and within reach. Back then, a more fluid understanding of socialism and communism had enjoyed far greater purchase in the political sphere. Even if insignificant in numbers, communists had far greater legitimacy than they did on the eve of what many had struggled for, and dreamed of, for decades. Those were also the days when there was little to distinguish between nationalism and internationalism. It was Nehru, after all, who said in 1927 that the spirit of internationalism had overtaken nationalism, and it was Nehru again who neatly summed up how far politics had travelled since then. Addressing a meeting in 1945, he commented on how the irreconcilable differences between the Congress and communists were essentially a clash between nationalist and internationalist ideals.[105] In trying to retain their commitment to both, communists had become politically isolated. Their dreams of what independence meant had been conclusively defeated. This was not the independence they had yearned for. The dream and objective of the CPI to keep India united, or even to have a 'Pakistan' within India, was 'blown to pieces'. As the ever-erudite Sohan Singh Josh put it, 'perhaps the dream was not strong enough by itself to prevent the heart rending tragedy of the Partition'.[106] Imprisoned by their dreams, communist revolutionaries did not imagine that history would unfold in the way that it did. The dream would have to wait, would have to be deferred, for a world in which victory would be theirs.

[105] PPSAI 1945, Simla-E, 31 August, No. 33, p. 301.
[106] Josh, *My Tryst with Secularism*, p. 276.

Epilogue
Utopias Lost

Aḳhir-e-shab ke ham-safar, 'Faiz' na jaane kya huey
Reh gai kis jagah saba, subah kidhar nikal gai[1]

Faiz Ahmad Faiz

West Punjab, 15 August 1947

Communists hoisted the Pakistan flag alongside their own on their party office in Rawalpindi. Both flags also flew on the offices of the *mazdoor* committees of Attock Oil Company, Murree Brewery, Military Engineering Service, and other industrial sites. Two comrades, V.D. Chopra and Sarup Singh, 'sold party literature and tried to mobilize public opinion in favour of making Pakistan a democratic state and not a theocratic one'. Not far from Rawalpindi, in the small town of Khaur, one Dev Dutt was found distributing handbills among labourers asking them to celebrate Independence Day and fly the Pakistan flag from their houses. Elsewhere, communists in Multan demanded that the Pakistan government 'safeguard minority interests, fix labour wages and frame rules for the betterment of the working classes'. Meanwhile, Gian Singh Josh came to notice in Montgomery for exhorting tenants of a farm to organize themselves in *kisan* committees.[2]

They would not have stayed long enough to continue their activism. Like millions of other non-Muslims, they too would have been forced to migrate to East Punjab. With their departure, West Punjab's communist, socialist, workers', and peasants' movements were dealt a severe blow. Left behind were a few veteran leaders like Mirza Muhammad

[1] What became of the companions of fading night, who knows?
Where was the breeze held, whither morning took flight, who knows?
Faiz Ahmad Faiz, 'Sham-e-Firaq', in *Nuskha Hai Wafa* (Educational Publishing House, 1999), p. 245, www.rekhta.org/ebooks/nuskha-e-haa-e-wafa-faiz-ahmad-faiz-ebooks. Translated by historian and writer Taimoor Shahid.

[2] West Punjab Police Secret Abstract of Intelligence (WPPSAI), 1947, Lahore, 23 August, No. 34, p. 423.

Ibrahim, Munshi Ahmed Din, and Dada Amir Haider Khan. Their depleted ranks were slowly filled by Muslim comrades migrating from India, but those were not enough to revive a struggling movement. Some planned to overcome the 'death of Muslim workers by encouraging the employment of Sikhs converted as Muslims instead'.[3] Others thought of 'importing' Muslim workers from Delhi and other provinces of India.[4] After Teja Singh's 'Pakistan Communist Party' foundered with his migration to East Punjab, a renewed attempt was made to organize a communist party for the new country. For that purpose, Sajjad Zaheer, leading member of the CPI and founder of the Progressive Writers' Association, was sent from India to Pakistan. Initially, however, it was not clear whether Pakistan would need a separate communist party. One line of thinking held that India and Pakistan would soon be reunited. Communists in Pakistan could simply continue working under the CPI. By 1948, though, it soon became apparent that reunification was not on the cards. In recognition of that, the CPI, in its Second Congress held at Calcutta in February–March 1948, endorsed the creation of a communist party for Pakistan. From there on, membership of the CPI was to be restricted to Indian nationals.

That said, the programmes of both communist parties were largely aligned with each other. The programme of the Communist Party of Pakistan called for the nationalization of key industries, radical agrarian reform, and the repeal of regressive laws. It also called for the reorganization of the new state on a linguistic basis, in which the resulting federating states would be granted the principle of self-determination.[5] This was in keeping with the CPI's 1942 endorsement of the principle of self-determination for India's nationalities. But more importantly, there was another point on which both parties were allied. The Calcutta Congress reaffirmed a resolution that 'the real freedom of both the countries was yet to be achieved and the present so-called freedom was the outcome of the unholy alliance between the Congress and the Muslim League'.[6] For both communist parties, then, the dream was still unfulfilled. Independence from formal colonial rule may have been achieved. Freedom, though, lay further along the horizon.

[3] WPPSAI, 1947, Lahore, 23 August, No. 35, p. 426.
[4] WPPSAI, 1947, Lahore, 13 September, No. 38, p. 454.
[5] IOR/L/P&J/12/772 CAIP, Letter from the High Commissioner for the United Kingdom in Pakistan, Karachi to the Commonwealth Relations Office, London dated 3 March 1948, p. 81.
[6] 'The Communist Party of West Pakistan in Action', published by CID Punjab (Lahore, 1952), p. 7.

Rawalpindi, 1949, date unknown

The year 1949 marked the first occasion when Dada was arrested in Pakistan. He was detained under an act meant to deal with communal rioting and was imprisoned for fifteen months in Rawalpindi. Shortly after his release, he was arrested again, this time under a newly passed Public Safety Act meant to deal with dissidents and opponents of the Pakistani state. He was also indicted in the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case in 1951. In the years to follow, Dada was arrested and imprisoned on two more occasions. When he was not in jail, he was confined to his village under the colonial practice of *nazarbandi*, where he had to report to the police on a weekly basis. His internment was lifted only in the 1970s. Even then, he was not allowed to leave Pakistan. His repeated requests for a passport were denied by the government. It was only after a fourteen-year legal battle that his request was finally granted. As a colonial subject, Dada had managed to travel across the world. But as a Pakistani citizen, his first and only visit 'abroad' was to India in 1988. This was the first, and only, time he got to meet his old comrades – or those who were still alive anyway – since Partition.[7]

Dada's experiences stood as a testament to what Pakistan meant for many communists, socialists, progressives, labour, and peasant leaders. Writing of the nascent and struggling communist movement in Pakistan in 1952, a CID report noted that 'communism is the most inexorable and momentous political force in the contemporary world'. While admitting that very little was known about the 'working of the party machine, its underground methods, its insidious technique, the fanatic zeal of its followers and their single mindedness of purpose', the report still expressed its concern at the apparently strengthening position of the communist party.[8] Much like its colonial predecessor, the post-colonial state also clung to an image of the Left that was far more formidable than the numbers it commanded. Again, much like the colonial state, the post-colonial state launched crackdowns on communists with a striking degree of efficiency. A key moment in that history was the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case.[9] Shortly after, in 1954, the Communist Party of Pakistan was banned. True to form, though, communists and progressives continued working through other platforms and political organizations. Notable

[7] Gardezi (ed.), *Chains to Lose*, pp. 747–767.
[8] 'The Communist Party of West Pakistan in Action', Preface.
[9] The conspiracy in question had allegedly been hatched by a number of officers in the army and communists. For a rare insight into this landmark event, see Hasan Zaheer, *The Times and Trial of the Rawalpindi Conspiracy 1951: The First Coup Attempt in Pakistan* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

among these were the Progressive Writers' Association and the National Awami Party, founded in 1957, which emerged to become the most prominent progressive political party in East and West Pakistan.[10]

For leftists, the experience of persecution and repression spoke volumes about the nature of the 'post'-colonial state. That point had been made early in the Constituent Assembly debates by Mian Iftikharuddin, a communist and a former member of the Punjab Congress, and later, the League. Addressing the Assembly in January 1950, Iftikharuddin wondered what exactly had changed when the same CID men who shadowed him in his days with the Congress and the League shadowed him after independence. As he put it, the question of civil liberties was 'synonymous with the question of freedom of the people of Pakistan'. Instead, the government only wanted submission and subservience. The 'freedom' that had been achieved was the 'freedom for the upper and middle classes'. Real freedom, he maintained, would only be achieved once workers and peasants were free from the exploitation of their capitalist and feudal overlords. Until then, 'freedom for 95 percent of the people of Pakistan will only be in name'.[11] His speech may have been given in 1950, but it remained representative of progressive thought for decades afterwards.

Iftikharuddin's dim view of 'independence' had startling echoes with what revolutionaries on the other side of the Radcliffe line were thinking. Writing on the eve of 15 August 1947, Bina Das was wondering why her comrades looked 'so lost and depressed'. Why was her country, she asked, 'not glowing under the rising sun of liberty?' Was this the 'freedom' of their dreams? A dream that had been 'marred by separation, fratricide, a cruel game of Holi played with blood, a conflict of petty self-interest'?[12] Her brother, too, stayed away from independence day celebrations. How could it be, he asked, that the 'flag of freedom' is hoisted by those who had 'insulted and humiliated the flag during the struggle'? The same police superintendent, he told Das, who shot revolutionary Matangini Hazara in front of his *thana* during the Quit India struggle will 'now stand in that same *thana* to hoist the flag'. Had she ever heard 'of such insults to the memory of heroes and martyrs of any other nation'?[13] Das had nothing by way of a reply. But she did have faith that 'a glorious

[10] For an overview of progressive and leftist movements in Pakistan, see Kamran Asdar Ali, *Surkh Salam: Communist Politics and Class Activism in Pakistan 1947–1972* (Oxford University Press, 2016) and Sadia Toor, *State of Islam: Culture and Cold War Politics in Pakistan* (Pluto Press, 2011).

[11] Abdullah Malik (ed.), *Selected Speeches and Statements: Mian Iftikharuddin* (Nigarishat, 1971), 'Speech on the Resolution Regarding Criticism of Government or Ministry, Constituent Assembly (Legislature) of Pakistan', 4 January 1950, pp. 160–162.

[12] Das, *A Memoir*, p. 1.

[13] Ibid., p. 125.

dawn' and a 'new age' lay ahead. This moment was, she exclaimed, a moment of 'light and shade', even if there were voices speaking of 'freedom' as '*hethai noi, onno katha, onno konokhane* – not here, not this, but something different elsewhere'.[14] Those voices found their foremost exponent across the border in the poetry of Faiz Ahmad Faiz, who famously called this moment a 'leprous daybreak' in his poem *Subh-e-Azadi*.[15] The 'post'-colonial state, it seemed, was not all that different from its colonial predecessor.

New Delhi, 5 August 1949

REPORTER: Between communism and communalism, which is the lesser evil?
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU: An extraordinary question to ask. Which do you prefer, death by drowning or falling from a precipice?

There were other questions too, that the first Prime Minister of India had to answer in his press conference. Most were related to communism. For Nehru, the Communist Party of India was 'completely allied with violence'. The party had nothing to do with the economic uplift of labour. Instead, it was focused on creating 'trouble and chaos'. On being asked whether he would seek the cooperation of the Hindu nationalist and paramilitary party, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), in fighting the 'communist menace', Nehru replied that although the RSS and the communists were 'poles apart', they were 'very near to each other, both in their love of violence and their authoritarianism'. If anything, he claimed, they sometimes even cooperated with each other to oppose the Congress.[16]

There was, of course, a context to Nehru's statements. In the previous year and more, India had been rocked by mass strikes and labour agitations. It had also faced communist insurgencies in Telengana and West Bengal. The party was banned (as was the RSS) under a variety of pretexts between 1948 and 1951 in all its major strongholds. The crackdown against the party had been accompanied by mass arrests and the ransacking of party and union offices.[17] Communists, it seemed, had become the primary enemy of the Indian state. An East Punjab minister

[14] Ibid., pp. 1–2.
[15] '*Subh-e-Azadi*', in Faiz Ahmad Faiz, *Nuskha Hai Wafa*, p. 116. The phrase 'leprous daybreak' comes from Victor Kiernan's translation of the poem. See 'Freedom's Dawn' in Victor G. Kiernan, *Poems by Faiz* (George Allen & Unwin, 1971), pp. 122–127.
[16] L/WS/1/1198, Communism in India and Pakistan, Telegram to Commonwealth Relations Office from UK High Commissioner in India, pp. 1–5.
[17] See for instance IOR/L/P&J/12/772 CAIP, Extract from the *Economist* dated 22 November 1947, POL 12015 1947 and Reuters India and Pakistan Service, 29 March 1948.

had even accused them of being involved in Mahatma Gandhi's assassination. They were also, he claimed, partly responsible for the recent massacres in the Punjab.[18]

Perhaps the only thing that united India and Pakistan in these fraught, difficult, and conflict-ridden years, was their view on communists. As in Pakistan, communists were viewed as a threat to the security and integrity of the Indian state. Nehru even admitted as much in his press conference. When asked whether India was heavy-handed in its approach towards communists, Nehru replied that there was often a conflict between the state's duty to maintain security and its duty to maintain liberty. Both could be sustained, he added, but in moments of crisis, security became more paramount.[19] His statement would not have been out of place in Pakistan.

Still, there was a key difference between India and Pakistan. Unlike Pakistan, the communist movement in India was considerably stronger and more widespread. It also had significant successes to its name, including representation in parliaments and state governments. It also had successes on the ground. In Indian Punjab, for instance, a successful agrarian agitation was launched by the Lal (Red) Communist Party, founded by none other than Teja Singh Swatantar and his Kirti and Ghadarite comrades. True to form, they had set up the Lal Party in opposition to what they viewed as an orthodox and doctrinaire CPI. Founded in January 1948, Teja Singh's party marked the first post-independence split in the Indian communist movement. Favouring a more militant struggle, the Lal Party was involved in mass tenant mobilizations, forcible occupations, revenue boycotts, dacoities, fatal clashes with police, and occasionally, assassinations of (allegedly) tyrannical landlords. While the party was forced to surrender in the face of military action, its tactics did, reportedly, compel the government to undertake significant land reforms in 1952. That same year, the Lal Party returned to the CPI fold. Even then, though, it continued operating as a distinct group, with its affiliates taking up arms in the Naxalite movement in the 1960s.[20] In contrast, the CPI formally renounced armed struggle in favour of a peaceful transition to socialism through electoral politics.

[18] IOR/L/P&J/12/772 CAIP, 'Sixty-Nine Communists Arrested in Punjab Simla', Reuters India and Pakistan Service, 3 April 1948, p. 146.

[19] L/WS/1/1198, Communism in India and Pakistan, Telegram, pp. 3–4.

[20] Paramjit S. Judge, *Insurrection to Agitation: The Naxalite Movement in Punjab* (South Asia Books, 1992), pp. 67–70. Also see Gurharpal Singh, *Communism in Punjab: A Study of the Movement up to 1967* (Ajanta Publications, 1994), chapter 4 and, in particular, Ajmer Sidhu, *From Ghadar to Naxalbari: Baba Bujha Singh: An Untold Story* (Tark Bharti Parkashan, 2013).

In due course, communist parties managed to form state governments in Kerala, Tripura, and West Bengal. To that end then, the communist, and the broader Left coalition, was markedly more prominent, and successful, than its counterpart in Pakistan.

Karachi, May 1956

Six years after the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) was founded in Berlin, in 1950, the Pakistan Committee Congress for Cultural Freedom was established in Karachi. Founded by intellectuals, artists, and scientists for the defence of free expression and cultural freedom, the CCF was a CIA-backed platform arraigned against communism and the Soviet Union.[21] With offices in Karachi and Dhaka, the Pakistan chapter of the CCF was opposed to what it viewed as the alarming spread of communist and progressive ideals in Pakistani society. 'Fascination for Communist ideology', the committee noted, had 'cast a spell over a fairly large section of the student community in Pakistan.'[22] As one of its tasks, the Pakistan chapter committed itself to defending cultural freedom and highlighting the 'positive role of religion in combatting the atheistic principles of communism'.[23]

The committee was part of a cultural, political, and ideological battle between progressives and their opponents in Pakistan.[24] This was a battle of ideas for the future of Pakistan in which the United States and the Soviet Union were actively involved through their patronage of one camp or the other. From its very inception in 1947, Pakistan had been a source of concern for the Anglo-American camp. At a moment when communists were on the verge of victory in China and on the march in South East Asia, Pakistan was viewed as a 'fertile field for Soviet intervention'. As it is, the Soviet Union was only separated from Pakistan by a tiny sliver of Afghan territory. The Soviet Union was also suspected of fomenting 'unrest' in Sinkiang, which bordered the northernmost princely states of Hunza and Nagar. Both states were also suspected of pro-Soviet inclinations.[25] In East Pakistan, communist infiltration from Burma or

[21] For more on the CCF, see Giles Scott-Smith and Charlotte A. Lerg (eds.), *Campaigning Culture and the Global Cold War: The Journals of the Congress for Cultural Freedom* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Patrick Iber, *Neither Peace nor Freedom: The Cultural Cold War in Latin America* (Harvard University Press, 2015); and Francis Stoner Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (The New Press, 2001).

[22] International Association for Cultural Freedom Records, Box 261 Folder 10, 'Programme of Youth, Sponsored by the Pakistan Committee', p. 1.

[23] Ibid., 'CCF–Pakistan Committee May 1956–December 1959', p. 8.

[24] See Toor, *State of Islam*, especially chapter 3.

[25] IOR/L/P&J/12/772 CAIP, Despatch from Office of HCUK, Karachi, pp. 130–131.

West Bengal remained a pressing threat.[26] For its part, the ruling Muslim League shared Anglo-American fears of communist encirclement. It also did not help that Pakistan, in the view of the British High Commissioner, 'abound[ed] with excellent material for communist agitation'.[27] The danger, as another British consular official put it, did not come from the negligible strength of the communist movement. Instead, it came from 'the misery which could be so easily exploited'.[28] As it was, Pakistan was overwhelmed by the refugee crisis, beset by political divisions, and at war with India over Kashmir.

From its very inception Pakistan was one of the many battlegrounds on which communism was fought. The battle against communism was necessarily multi-pronged, in which ideational and cultural arenas were as important as state power. The invocation of Islam was crucial to this strategy. Notwithstanding the fact that communism had made inroads in 'Muslim societies', Islam could still be deployed as a crucial bulwark against communism in the battle over ideas and future trajectories. The daily *Dawn* summed up it best when it argued how 'the spiritual force of Islam' could play its part in repulsing 'the false philosophy of Communism'.[29] This was where the American-backed CCF, alongside other platforms and political organizations, became even more significant.

For their part, progressive movements and platforms also actively situated their politics in the possibilities offered by the Cold War. They also actively maintained their links with like-minded movements internationally. Interwar internationalism may have been a distant memory, but a new internationalism was on the horizon. Its spirit resurfaced in the 1950s and 1960s as former colonies across the Global South became independent. This era was marked by the Bandung spirit, by emerging Afro-Asian connections, and by the politics of Third World solidarity. The future, it seemed, went via the Third World.[30]

[26] IOR/L/P&J/12/772 CAIP, Communist Movement in East Bengal, p. 353.
[27] IOR/L/P&J/12/772 CAIP, Despatch from Office of HCUK, Karachi, p. 132.
[28] IOR/L/P&J/12/772 CAIP, Extract from letter from Deputy UKHC, Lahore, 22 February 1948, Pol. 7071/48, p. 83.
[29] IOR/L/P&J/12/772 CAIP, Extract No. 28, from High Commissioner for the UK in Pakistan, Karachi to Commonwealth Relations Office, 4 February 1949, Pol. 10825/49.
[30] See Samantha Christiansen and Zachary Scarlett (eds.), *The Third World in the Global 1960s* (Berghahn, 2012); Christopher J. Lee, *The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives* (Ohio University Press, 2010); and Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New Press, 2007). See also the conclusion of Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* (Grove Press, 2005). For a glimpse in how the politics of Afro-Asianism played out in Pakistan, see my article, 'Dispatches from Havana: The Cold War, Afro-Asian Solidarities, and Culture Wars in Pakistan', *Journal of World History* 30, 1&2 (2019).

***

Together, these four vignettes provide a fleeting glimpse into the afterlives of the communist movement in united India. The heady days of interwar internationalism may have been a thing of the past, but communist movements in both India and Pakistan continued to situate their politics in the interstices of national and international developments. In the battle over ideas between the two Cold War superpowers and in the internationalism of the 1950s and 1960s, both movements also became part of the Cold War. They were also subject to persecution in ways that would not have been out of place in the British Raj. This was especially the case in Pakistan where an already weak progressive coalition of workers, intellectuals, students, ethnic nationalists, and political activists was systematically persecuted by successive civilian governments and military dictatorships. For many, then, not much had changed. The utopias they yearned for remained as elusive as ever.

All this stood in stark contrast to the heady, euphoric, and utopian times of the 1910s and the interwar period. In this book, I have tried to bring that historical moment to life. That all-too-brief era seems both hauntingly familiar *and* alien to us in our present moment: familiar for its dissatisfaction with the state of the world, and yet all too alien for its range of historical imaginations, utopianisms, and imminent possibilities. Through the global project of Communist Internationalism and its inflections in India, I traced the trajectory of those possibilities from the Great War to the Second World War and decolonization. That this period was far from a singular, uninterrupted, and self-enclosed moment goes without saying. It was marked by national and international shifts that had a profound impact on the evolution of the communist movement in India. From its inception as a broad camp incorporating an astonishing variety of socio-political imaginations, communism grew sharper and more distinct from other political and ideological camps in India. In that, it was also influenced by congruent shifts within the international communist movement. The dissolution of the Communist International in 1943 marked one end of that moment. Partition and decolonization marked another. With the formal transfer of power to India and Pakistan, one *raison d'être* for the communist movement in united India came to an undesirable end. And yet, it marked the beginning of another era, an era that would herald what many imagined as true, substantive, freedom.

In tracing the evolution of communist politics in colonial India, I foregrounded the ordinary figures who participated in the global and transformative project of Communist Internationalism. Their lives provide a corrective to party-centric histories, which as Ania Loomba and

others have pointed out, have left enormous gaps in our understanding of revolutionary pasts.[31] Much the same can be said about the emphasis on intellectual histories, which tend to deify key individuals and their theoretical contributions to Marxist, communist, socialist, and revolutionary thought. That said, this is not to deny the importance of these histories. Nor is it to deny the fundamentally reparative, restorative, and decolonial gesture that underpins such inquiries. The continuing excavation of these ideas has served as a persistent, and much required, reminder that the colony was also the site of intellectual production, and not merely a recipient of it.[32] This task is even more urgent when it comes to communist thought, which is still viewed as derivative in nature, never quite belonging, never sufficiently original.[33] Communists, it seems, are destined to live under the shadow of a bygone Soviet (read: European) past, in which there is little appreciation for how it became part of the everyday in South Asia. This is precisely where a focus on lives, lived experiences, and itinerancy can be illuminating. Viewed through this lens, communists appear as anything but the robotic, humourless, ideologues they are frequently cast as in colonial discourse and the historiography that emerged in its wake. What is more, this view may also enable us to move away from the stability, fixity, and remoteness of ideological frameworks. Instead, we are compelled to ask how ideas moved, evolved, and changed over time, and, more importantly, how they were embedded in certain spaces and co-constitutive of the people who carried them.

Thus, once viewed through revolutionary lives, political subjectivities, and intellectual trajectories, the history of communism in South Asia looks far removed from the way it has predominantly been written. It appears less rigid, less internally consistent, less party-oriented, less elite-centred and, more importantly, less *foreign*. That, at any rate, was how communism was perceived by both the colonial and post-colonial state, and the historiographical tradition that emerged in their shadows. This is where a closer look at region and locality became even more instructive. In mostly focusing on one region, the Punjab, I showed how Communist Internationalism was woven in with locally situated social, cultural, and

[31] Loomba, *Revolutionary Desires*, p. 25.

[32] A recent explication of that is provided by Yasmin Saikia and her excavation of ideas relating to *azadi*. See Yasmin Saikia, '*Hijrat* and *Azadi* in Indian Muslim Imagination and Practice Connecting Nationalism, Internationalism, and Cosmopolitanism', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 37, 2 (2017), 201–212. Saikia also calls for an urgent 'methodological and conceptual shift in writing postcolonial history' that has otherwise given far too much attention to political organizations and elite leaderships.

[33] Indeed, Vijay Prashad makes much the same point in his introduction to *Communist Histories*.

religious idioms. Indeed, in the early interwar period, there was little to separate communism from other radical and anti-imperial camps. Nor was there much distinction between nationalism and internationalism. Both were almost inseparable from each other. In what Kris Manjapra has identified as the 'communist ecumene',[34] varying political threads converged to produce a politics that was unique to the interwar period. The fluidity of this moment in turn was reflective of the many hopes, dreams, and expectations that millions held of a post-imperial and post-capitalist world. But that opening was also a function of a world in which anything and everything seemed possible. Over the course of the interwar period, communism became more isolated and distinct from other political affiliations in the subcontinent and elsewhere. Alongside being influenced by shifts within the international communist movement, a key role was also played by the colonial state along with nationalist and communitarian movements. The communist movement of the late interwar period, then, was very different from its earlier iteration. Even so, that process did not impede or discourage the utopian imagination that helped make communist politics possible and viable. This is again where a focus on fairly ordinary individuals – admittedly, mostly men – allowed me to show how these subjects were constituted through a specific and affective relationship with Time. They imagined themselves as figures who were both driven by, and capable of making, History. They were, in other words, utopian subjects.

Utopias Lost

Are the utopias they dreamed of irrevocably lost? In the seemingly inexorable forward march of populisms and parochial nationalisms in South Asia and beyond, it would certainly appear so. The accepted consensus seems to be that of a historical defeat. This is a consensus that the South Asian Left has also shared, especially in Pakistan, where the repressive military dictatorship of General Zia-ul-Haq and the fall of the Soviet Union seemingly spelt the end of progressive movements in the country. Over the 1990s, it appeared as if the Left, in Pakistan and elsewhere, had lost faith in the grand and idealistic dreams they had inherited from their forebears. Not only had those dreams faded, they had also gone disastrously wrong in the shape of totalitarianisms, mass repressions, and mass graves. To that, one can also add what Fredric Jameson diagnosed as a 'weakening of historicity, or of the sense of the

[34] See Kris Manjapra, 'Communist Internationalism and Transcolonial Recognition', in Manjapra and Bose (eds.), *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones*.

future; a conviction that fundamental change is no longer possible, however desirable; and cynical reason as such'.[35] Perhaps all that remained in the 'eclipse of utopias'[36] was a yearning for a past in which a transformed world seemed within reach. Thus, as Svetlana Boym reminds us, 'the 20th century began with a futuristic utopia and ended with nostalgia'.[37] While Byom's work is a detailed meditation on longing, nostalgia, and the search of home, her remark resonates with the tone in which the Left is written about and commemorated today. To the nostalgic one can add what Enzo Traverso has diagnosed as the melancholic vision of history. To that end, this book, too, would appear to fit that category.

What kind of a present are we left with, then? For Traverso, we live in a present that is charged with memory but unable to project itself into the future. Invoking Reinhart Koselleck, he argues that there is no visible horizon of expectation.[38] Utopia, it seems, no longer belongs to the present of our societies, at least in the way it did in the transformative schemes of the twentieth century. Perhaps nowhere is this truer than in the post-colonial world, where, as David Scott notes, 'anti-colonial utopias have gradually withered into post-colonial nightmares'.[39] And what makes these nightmares seemingly endless is that

> The temporality that shaped our past sense of the constitutive relation between pasts, presents, and futures has come undone, run aground, or anyway no longer accords with something fundamental in our experience and expectations of the rhythms of contemporary time. Our past sense of futurity, as the longing for and expectation of a progressive or even a revolutionary overcoming of the limitations and discontents of the past, has virtually evaporated such that we no longer have any confidence that the present will give rise to a future significantly different from the past, a future without the present's burdened inheritance of the past's violations, subjugations, and dispossessions.[40]

Our time, David Scott suggests elsewhere, is truly 'out of joint'.[41]

[35] Fredric Jameson, 'Utopia as Method, or the Uses of the Future', in Gordin, Tilley, and Prakash (eds.), *Utopia/Dystopia*, p. 24.
[36] Enzo Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History, and Memory* (Columbia University Press, 2016).
[37] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (Basic Books, 2001), p. 16.
[38] Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia*.
[39] David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Duke University Press, 2004), p. 2.
[40] David Scott, 'Black Futurities Past and Present: Thinking Reparations Through', Lecture, Colonial Repercussions/Koloniales Erbe Symposium III (Planetary Utopias – Hope, Desire, Imaginaries in a Post-Colonial World), Akademie der Künste, Berlin, 23 June 2018.
[41] A hauntingly beautiful phrase that originally comes from *Hamlet*, but invoked here by Scott in *Conscripts of Modernity*, p. 2.

What would it take for our time to be invested with meaning, and hope, for an emancipated future? What can revolutionary pasts offer us in this respect? Is there anything to learn from utopianisms and utopian subjects? Or, to invoke Gordin, Tilley, and Prakash again,

> Are we to believe that such dreaming has outlived its purpose? … If so many emancipatory promises have been betrayed and liberatory movements come undone, does that mean that none should be attempted or proposed again? Have we reached a point beyond utopia?[42]

For these scholars, the answer is an unequivocal no, and I would agree. The subjects of this book would have resisted this implication as well. But what should utopian visions and dreams look like in our moment? Is it worth simply resuscitating progressive utopian visions of the early twentieth century and reclaiming them as our own? Again, the answer would appear to be no. Those visions were clearly a product of their time. They were also problematic in their claim to absolute truth. Clearly, then, there is little traction in reclaiming those projects uncritically, through what Byom would call the practice of restorative nostalgia. In their place, we need alternate, self-reflexive, and historically informed utopian futures that speak to our present. This is not merely a speculative exercise. Instead, in Jameson's view,

> This kind of prospective hermeneutic is a political act only in one specific sense: as a contribution to the reawakening of the imagination of possible and alternate futures, a reawakening of that historicity which our system – offering itself as the very end of history – necessarily represses and paralyzes. This is the sense in which utopology revives long-dormant parts of the mind, unused organs of political, historical, and social imagination that have virtually atrophied for lack of use, muscles of praxis we have long since ceased exercising, revolutionary gestures we have lost the habit of performing, even subliminally. Such a revival of futurity and of the positing of alternate futures is not a political program or even a political practice, but it is hard to see how any durable or effective political action could come into being without it.[43]

It goes without saying that 'exercising those unused organs of political, historical, and social imagination' and the consequent 'positing of alternate futures' would hardly be possible without a historical excavation of those imaginations and possibilities. Asking certain questions of the past, after all, can enable other futures. Put simply, then, utopian and revolutionary pasts still have a lot to teach us. That, I suspect, is an assessment the subjects of this book would have agreed with. If their

[42] Gordin, Tilley, and Prakash (eds.), *Utopia/Dystopia*, p. 13.
[43] Jameson, 'Utopia as Method', pp. 42–43.

lives are any guide, history, and the writing of history as a practice and an ethic, has a crucial role to play in keeping the possibilities for our present and future open. More than a specific project that needs to be uncritically reclaimed, then, what revolutionary pasts can offer us is a reminder of, and invitation to, alternate ethical subjectivities and possibilities that seem increasingly foreclosed in contemporary South Asia today. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the strengthening of parochial nationalisms and fundamentalisms in all three countries is enabled by a wilful forgetting of alternate pasts and, consequently, alternate futures.

Those possibilities, though, require an ethical subject. They require a utopian subject. What does that subject look like? This is again where revolutionary pasts become instructive. The historical moment narrated by this book inaugurated a utopian subject that refused to accept the present as a given. By that same token, that subject also refused a foreclosed future. This subject was driven by a historical imagination that insisted on the open-endedness of futures. That in turn required an embodied ethic that was driven by a relentless search for the seeds of transformative change, even in the bleakest of circumstances. This ethic also required projecting on an otherwise empty and hollowed-out Time a meaning that insisted on every moment, in Walter Benjamin's spirit, as a moment of possibility, as a moment of rupture, as a moment of transformation, and as a moment that interrupted the reproducibility of an oppressive present. The imaginative resources to cultivate that ethic, though, are reliant on the telling and retelling of these stories. For that reason alone, we need these stories. We need these subjects. We need these dreamers.

***

My *Mamu*, Jauhar Hussain, was one of those inveterate and unapologetic dreamers. He was an activist in the National Students Federation and other leftist platforms in the 1960s. Those were heady days, when it seemed that Pakistan, and the world, was on the cusp of revolution. And much like the comrades of an earlier generation who came of political age during colonial times, he too paid a heavy price for his activism. He was exiled from his city of Karachi and jailed under Ayub Khan's dictatorship. Still, he kept working as an active member of the leftist movement in Pakistan. From its heyday in the 1960s, however, there was nothing remaining of the Left by the 1980s. It had been brutally suppressed by yet another dictatorship that brooked no dissent. Those who could, fled. Those who couldn't, went to jail. Others, gave up on the dream. Very few carried the torch forward.

He was one of the few who did.

In the last days of his life, he occupied himself with one project after another. One evening, he saw me reading a book from his collection. I was hardly 14. I forget what the book was about, but it must have been something that caught his attention too. He told me that he had something for me. He led me to his room with a tired shuffle that betrayed his poor health. His yellowish, wrinkled, and leathery skin belied his age. Decades of chain smoking had taken toll. He rummaged through his cupboard and handed a newly minted pamphlet to me. It was titled 'The Socio-Economic Causes of Partition Violence', and it had been published by the 'Society for the Preservation of the History of Revolutionary Struggles in Pakistan'.[44] Who runs this society, I asked? Three comrades, he said. The 'president' had died recently. He was the 'general secretary'. And given his rapidly deteriorating health, he knew he was going to follow shortly. He gave me the pamphlet and asked me to read it. I would learn something, he told me.

I am not sure if I learnt anything then. But I do think I have learnt something now. I never reflected on that encounter, until I thought of this book. And the need to remember. Not just revolutionary histories, but also the dreamers, idealists, and iconoclasts who made those histories possible. They may have not succeeded in their own estimation, but they left in their wake a trail of dreams and possibilities yet to be realized. And whilst the utopias they yearned for may have receded further into the distance, they could find some solace in knowing that they dedicated their lives to a cause larger than themselves.

'I am leaving after having lived a full life', Josh dictated in his will.[45]

Few, I suspect, would have disagreed.

[44] That pamphlet was an appropriate reflection of what virtually every comrade since 1947 had believed: that there were deeper structural and socio-economic causes for Partition violence. They could never quite believe that the people they loved and devoted their political lives to could ever be capable of hatred and intercommunal strife.

[45] Josh, *My Tryst with Secularism*, p. v.

Glossary

Amrit	Syrup used in Sikh baptism/initiation ceremonies
Anjuman	Association
Azadi	Freedom
Begar	Forced labour
Chaprasi	Peon
Chowkidar	Watchman
Desh Bhagat	Patriot
Dukh	Sorrow
Fatwa	Religious edict
Ghadar	Mutiny
Ghoondas	Bad characters/criminals
Granthi	Keeper and reader of *Guru Granth Sahib*
Gurdwara	Sikh temple
Guru Granth Sahib	Holy scripture of the Sikhs
Inquilab	Revolution
Jatha	Band/group
Jathedar	Leader of *jatha*
Jihadi	Muslim holy warrior
Kafirs	Disbelievers
Khuda	God
Kirti	Labourer
Kisan	Peasant
Mahant	Priest/caretaker of temple/*gurdwara*
Mamu	Maternal uncle
Maulvi	Muslim clergyman
Mazdur	Labourer
Mehnatkash	Labourer
Morcha	Agitation
Muhajir	Person who performs *Hijrat* (a migration usually (performed) for religious purposes)
Murdabad	Death to

Nastik	Atheist
Naujawan	Young men
Nazarbandi	A mode of punishment in which convicts are restricted to their village/home
Nikah	Muslim marriage agreement/contract
Numbardar	Village official
Panchayat	Village council
Pandit	Hindu priest/caste
Panth	'Path', used to denote a religious community/sect
Pardah	Veil
Patwaris	Keepers of land records
Pir	Holy man/descendant and trustee of a Sufi shrine
Qabaristan	Graveyard
Qafla	Caravan
Qarza	Loan
Qasba	Locality
Rasul	Prophet
Sabha	Party/organization
Sahukar	Moneylender
Sajjada nashin	Descendant and trustee of a Sufi shrine
Sarkar	State
Saropa	Garment/cloth/scarf of honour
Shaheed	Martyr
Sufedposh	Honorific title for socially respectable individuals or officials
Swaraj	Sovereignty, self-rule
Tehsil	Administrative division
Thana	Police station
Thikri Pehra	Night patrolling
Tonga	Horse-drawn carriage
Updeshak	Preacher
Ulema	Muslim clergy
Zail	Administrative unit consisting of up to a few dozen villages
Zaildar	Official in charge of a *zail*
Zamindar	Cultivating landowner – not similar to the large landowning *zamindars* in the United Provinces
Zindabad	Long live

Bibliography

Archival and Manuscript Sources

Bodleian Library, University of Oxford

Report on the Police Administration in the Punjab (RPAP) for the Year 1914–38

British Library, London

Communism in India 1924–1927 (Calcutta: Government of India Press, 1927) IOR/V/27/262/3

Communist Activities in India and Pakistan, Jan 1947–Oct 1949, IOR/L/P&J/12/772

Indian Political Intelligence Files IOR/L/P&J/12 Series (IPI-2 Islam & the Khilafat Movement 1922–1940; IPI-4 Communism: Russia, 1922–1938; IPI-6 Communism: India & Indian Communist Party 1921–1950; IPI-7 Meerut Conspiracy Case 1928–1933; IPI-8 Revolutionary and Terrorist Activities 1914–1942; IPI-9 Control and Censorship 1918–49; IPI-12 Other Organizations and Movements 1921–1947; IPI-13 North America 1912–1948; IPI-14 Axis Powers 1924–1949; IPI-16 Personal Files 1916–1949; IPI-17 Miscellaneous Reports and Subjects 1916–1949 – Local Governments Fortnightly Reports on the Political Situation, Punjab 1929–1944)

Intelligence Bureau, India and Communism (Home Department, Government of India, 1933, Reprinted 1935) IOR/V/27/262/5

Intelligence Bureau, The Ghadr Directory (New Delhi: Government of India Press, 1934) IOR/V/27/262/6

Intelligence Summaries, India – Internal IOR/L/WS/1/1433

J.C. Ker, Political Trouble in India, 1907–1917 (Calcutta, 1917) IOR/V/27/262/8

Centre for South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge

Kirti
National Front
The People

Desh Bhagat Yadgar Hall, Jullundur

Kirti
Kirti Lehar

International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam

Kirti
The People
Progressive Movements in Pakistan Collection

Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi

P.C. Joshi Archives

Library of Congress, Washington DC

Comintern Archives

Library, School of Oriental and African Studies, London

India: A People Partitioned Oral Archive

Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick

Dr Gurharpal Singh Archive: Communist Movement in the Punjab

National Archives of Pakistan, Islamabad

Civil and Military Gazette

National Documentation Centre, Islamabad

Fortnightly Reports on Situation in Punjab by the Chief Secretary, Punjab Government 1939–46
Punjab Police Secret Abstract of Intelligence: 1940–48

National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, Islamabad

Punjab Police Secret Abstracts of Intelligence

Sindh Archives, Karachi

Shamsul Hassan Collection

Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin

Horst Kruger Nachlass
Meerut Conspiracy Case Papers
People's War
Qaumi Jang

Printed Primary Sources

Adhikari, Gangadhar, *Sikh Homeland through Hindu–Muslim–Sikh Unity* (Bombay: Sharaf Athar Ali, 1945)

Pakistan and Indian National Unity (London: Labour Monthly, 1983)

Adhikari, Gangadhar M., Rao, M.B., and Sen, Mohit (eds.), *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India*, vols. 1–7 (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1971)

Ahmad, Muzzaffar, *Myself and the Communist Party of India, 1920–1929* (Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1970)

Communists Challenge Imperialism from the Dock (Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1967)

The Communist Party of India and Its Formation Abroad (Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1962)

Aibak, Zafar Hasan, *Aap Beeti* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1990)

Azad, Prithvi Singh, *Baba Prithvi Singh Azad, The Legendary Crusader: An Autobiography* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1987)

Basu, Jyoti (ed.), *Documents of the Communist Party of India: (1917–28)*, vol. 1; *Meerut Conspiracy Case (1929)*, vol. 2; *(1929–38)*, vol. 3; *(1939–43)*, vol. 4; *(1944–48)*, vol. 5 (Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1997)

Bilga, Bhagat Singh, *Ghadar Lehar de Anfoley Varkey: Ghadar Party te Kirti Party 1908–1952* (Jullundur: Desh Bhagat Yadgar Committee, 1989) (excerpted, translated, and transcribed by Amarjit Chandan)

Bose, Arun (ed.), *Indian Revolutionaries Abroad, 1905–1927: Select Documents* (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 2002)

Boym, Svetlana, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001)

Brayne, F.L., *Better Villages*, 3rd edn (Bombay, New York: Oxford University Press, 1946)

Carter, Lionel (ed.), *Punjab Politics, 1940–43: Strains of War* (*Governors' Fortnightly Reports and Other Key Documents*) (New Delhi: Manohar, 2005)

Chadda, Tilak Raj, *A Study of the Communist Movement in the Punjab* (Delhi: New India Press, 1954)

Chain, Chain Singh, *My Political Journey*, trans. Satnam (2008)

Kirti Party: Dooji Jang Samey (Jullundur: Desh Bhagat Yadgar, 1990) (excerpted, translated, and transcribed by Amarjit Chandan)

Chakravartty, Renu, *Communists in Indian Women's Movement, 1940–1950* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1980)

Chandan, Gopal Singh, 'On Kenya Ghadar-Kirti Party' (2003) (excerpted from *Mera Jivan*, trans. Amarjit Chandan (Jullundur: Desh Bhagat Yadgar))

Chauhan, Shivdan Singh, *Prithvi Singh Azad in Lenin's Land*, trans. Vijay Chauhan (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1980)
Dang, Vimla, *Fragments of an Autobiography* (New Delhi: Asha Jyoti Publishers, 2007)
Das, Bina, *Bina Das: A Memoir* (New Delhi: Zubaan Books, 2005)
Dhoot, Naina Singh, *The Political Memoirs of an Indian Revolutionary*, trans. Surinder Singh (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2005)
Dutt, Kalpana, *Chittagong Armoury Raiders: Reminiscences* (Bombay: People's Publishing House, 1945)
Ewans, Martin (ed.), *The Great Game: Britain and Russia in Central Asia: Documents* (London: Routledge, 2004)
Fitzpatrick, Sheila, and Slezkine, Yuri (eds.), *In the Shadow of Revolution: Life Stories of Russian Women from 1917 to the Second World War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000)
Ghadar di Gunj (Echoes of Mutiny) available, along with other Ghadar documents, at the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA), www.saadigitalarchive.org/
Ghadr Party's Lahore Conspiracy Case: 1915 Judgement (Meerut: Archana Publications, 2006)
Gupta, D.N (ed.), *Bhagat Singh, Select Speeches & Writings* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 2007)
Haywood, Harry, *Black Bolshevik: Autobiography of an Afro-American Communist* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1978)
Hutchinson, Lester, *Conspiracy at Meerut: An Account of the Trial of the Author and Others, 1929–1933* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1935)
Isemonger, F.C., and Slattery, J., *An Account of the Ghadr Conspiracy* (Lahore: Punjab Government, 1919)
James, C.L.R., *World Revolution, 1917–1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017)
Josh, Sohan Singh, *Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna: Life of the Founder of the Ghadar Party* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1970)
My Meetings with Bhagat Singh and on Other Early Revolutionaries (New Delhi: Communist Party of India, 1976)
Hindustan Ghadr Party: A Short History, 2 vols. (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1977)
The Great Attack: Meerut Conspiracy Case (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1979)
My Tryst with Secularism: An Autobiography (New Delhi: Patriot Publishers, 1991)
Kesar, Kesar Singh, and Kesar, Jasbir Kaur, *Diary: Ghadari Baba Harjap Singh* (Jullundur: Desh Bhagat Yadgar Committee, 1998)
Kollontai, Alexandra, 'The Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Communist Woman', www.marxists.org/archive/kollonta/index.htm
'New Woman' (1918), www.marxists.org
'Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle' (1921), www.marxists.org
Lenin, V.I., 'The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self Determination 1916', www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/jan/x01.htm

'Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism' (1917), www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc

Draft Theses on National and Colonial Questions for the Second Congress of the Communist International' (5 June 1920), www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/jun/05.htm

Malik, Abdullah (ed.), *Selected Speeches and Statements of Mian Iftikharuddin* (Lahore: Nigarishat, 1971)

McKay, Claude, *A Long Way from Home* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007)

Memorandum on the Disturbances in the Punjab April 1919 (Lahore: Government Printing Punjab, 1920; republished Sang-e-meel Publications, Lahore, 1997)

Mukhopadhyay, A.K. (ed.), *India and Communism: Secret British Documents* (Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1997; originally published, Simla, 1935)

Narayan, Jayaprakash, *Why Socialism?* (Benares: All India Congress Socialist Party, 1936)

Noyce, Frank, *England, India and Afghanistan: An Essay upon the Relations, Past and Future, Between Afghanistan and the British Empire in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902)

O'Dwyer, Michael, *India as I Knew It, 1885–1925*, 2nd edn (London: Constable, 1925)

Ray, Sibnarayan (ed.), *Selected Works of M.N. Roy* (4 vols., Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987, 1988, 1990, 1997)

Reed, John, *Ten Days That Shook the World* (1919), www.marxists.org/archive/reed/1919/10days/10days/

Rees, Tim, and Thorpe, Andrew (eds.), *International Communism and the Communist International 1919–43* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998)

Robinson, Robert, *Black on Red: My 44 Years inside the Soviet Union* (Washington DC: Acropolis Books, 1988)

Rowlatt, S.A.T., *Sedition Committee, 1918: Report* (Calcutta: Government Printing, 1918)

Roy, M.N., *M.N. Roy's Memoirs* (Bombay: Allied Publishers Private, 1964)

Roy, Subodh (ed.), *Communism in India 1919–24* (Calcutta: Editions India, 1971)

Communism in India: Unpublished Documents, 1925–1934 (Calcutta: Ganasahitya Prakash, 1972)

Communism in India: Unpublished Documents, 1935–1945 (Calcutta: Ganasahitya Prakash, 1976)

Sareen, T.R. (ed.), *Select Documents on the Ghadr Party* (New Delhi: Mounto Publishing House, 1994)

Secret Documents on Singapore Mutiny 1915 (New Delhi: Mounto Publishing House, 1995)

Sen, Manikuntala, *In Search of Freedom: An Unfinished Journey* (Calcutta: Stree, 2001)

Sidhu, Ajmer, *From Ghadar to Naxalbari. Baba Bujha Singh: An Untold Story*, (Barnala: Tarkbharti Parkashan, 2013)

Singh, Bhai Nahar, and Singh, Bhai Kirpal (eds.), *Struggle for Free Hindustan: Ghadr Directory 1916–17* (New Delhi: Gobind Sadan Institute for Advanced Studies in Comparative Religion, 1996)
Singh, Harnam, *Punjab: Homeland of the Sikhs* (Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette, 1945)
Singh, Randhir, *Ghadar Heroes: Forgotten Story of the Punjab Revolutionaries 1914–1915* (Bombay: People's Publishing House, 1945)
Singh, Saadhu Swarup, *The Sikhs Demand Their Homeland* (Lahore: Lahore Book Shop, 1946)
Smedley, Agnes, *Daughter of Earth* (1929)
Spratt, Philip, *Communism and India* (New Delhi: Eastern Economist, 1952)
Blowing up India: Reminiscences and Reflections of a Former Comintern Emissary (Calcutta: Prachi Prakashan, 1955)
Stalin, J., 'The Political Tasks of the University of the Peoples of the East: Speech delivered at a meeting of students of the Communist University of the Toilers of the East', www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1925/05/18.htm
'Marxism and the National Question' (1913)
'Concerning Questions of Leninism' (1926)
Surjeet, Harikishen S., *An Outline History of the Communist Movement in India* (New Delhi: National Book Centre, 1993)
The Punjab and the War (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 1997; originally published Lahore: Government Printing Punjab, 1922)
Usmani, Shaukat, *Peshawar to Moscow: Leaves from an Indian Muhajireen's Diary* (Benares: Swaraj Publishing House, 1927)
I Met Stalin Twice (Bombay: K. Kurian, 1953)
Historic Trips of a Revolutionary: Sojourn in the Soviet Union (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1977)
'Unknown Revolutionary' or 'This Is My Life' (unpublished manuscript)
Waraich, Malwinderjit Singh, and Sidhu, Gurdev Singh (eds.), *Komagata maru, A Challenge to Colonialism: Key Documents* (Chandigarh: Unistar Books, 2005)
Wilde, Oscar, *The Soul of Man under Socialism* (1891), www.marxists.org/reference/archive/wilde-oscar/soul-man/

Secondary Works

Adi, Hakim, *Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Communist International, Africa and the Diaspora, 1919–1939* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2013)
Adorno, Theodor, *Minima Moralia. Reflections from Damaged Life* (1951), www.marxists.org/reference/archive/adorno/1951/mm/ch01.htm
Ahmed, Ishtiaq, *The Punjab Bloodied, Partitioned and Cleansed: Unravelling the 1947 Tragedy through Secret British Reports and First-Person Accounts* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2014)
Ahmed, Manan, *A Book of Conquest: The Chachnama and Muslim Origins in South Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016)

Ahmed, Talat, *Literature and Politics in the Age of Nationalism: The Progressive Episode in South Asia, 1932–56* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2009)

Ahuja, Ravi, 'Subaltern Networks under British Imperialism. Exploring the Case of South Asian Maritime Labour (c. 1890–47)', in Jan-Georg Deutsch and Brigitte Reinwald (eds.), *Space on the Move. Transformations of the Indian Ocean Seascape in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century.* Arbeitshefte 20 (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, date unknown)

Ali, Agha Shahid, 'Farewell', in *The Country without a Post Office: Poems 1991–1995* (Ravi Dayal, 2000)

Ali, Kamran Asdar, *Surkh Salam: Communist Politics and Class Activism in Pakistan 1947–1972* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2016)

'Communists in a Muslim Land: Cultural Debates in Pakistan's Early Years' *Modern Asian Studies* 45, 3 (2011), 501–534

Ames, Eric, *Carl Hagenbeck's Empire of Entertainments* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2009)

Ansari, K.H., 'Pan Islam and the Making of the Early Muslim Socialists', *Modern Asian Studies* 20, 3 (1986), 509–537

The Emergence of Socialist Thought among North Indian Muslims (Lahore: Book Traders, 1990)

'Maulana Barkatullah Bhopali's Transnationalism: Pan-Islamism, Colonialism, and Radical Politics', in Gotz Nordbruch and Umar Ryad (eds.), *Transnational Islam in Interwar Europe: Muslim Activists and Thinkers* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 181–210

Armstrong, Elisabeth, 'Indian Peasant Women's Activism in a Hot Cold War', in Vijay Prashad (ed.), *Communist Histories,* vol. 1 (Delhi: LeftWord Books, 2016), pp. 113–137

Arnold, David, and Blackburn, Stuart (eds.), *Telling Lives in India: Biography, Autobiography, and Life History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004)

Baha, Lal, 'The Hijrat Movement and the North-West Frontier Province', *Islamic Studies* 18, 3 (1979), 231–242

Balachandran, Gopalan, 'Searching for the *Sardar*: The State, Pre-Capitalist Institutions and Human Agency in the Maritime Labour Market in Calcutta, 1880–1935', in Burton Stein and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (eds.), *Institutions and Economic Change in South Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 206–306

Bald, Vivek, *Bengali Harlem and the Lost Histories of South Asian America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013)

Bandyopadhyaya, J., *Indian Nationalism versus International Communism: Role of Ideology in International Politics* (Calcutta: Firma K.L Mukhopadhyay, 1966)

Barooah, Nirode K., *Chatto: The Life and Times of an Indian Anti-Imperialist in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)

Barrier, Gerald N., 'The Arya Samaj and Congress Politics in the Punjab, 1894–1908', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 26, 3 (May 1967), 364–373

Banned: Controversial Literature and Political Control in British India, 1907–1947 (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1974)

Benjamin, Walter, 'On the Concept of History' (1940), www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm

Illuminations: Essays and Reflections (New York: Schocken Books, 1969)

Bergere, Marie-Claire, *Shanghai: China's Gateway to Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009)

Bloch, Ernst, *The Principle of Hope*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995)

The Spirit of Hope (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000)

Blomm, Philipp, *Vertigo Years: Europe 1900–1914* (New York: Basic Books, 2010)

Bose, Mihir, *Silver: The Spy Who Fooled the Nazis. The Most Remarkable Agent of the Second World War* (Stroud: Fonthill Media, 2016)

Bose, Sanat, 'Communist International and Indian Trade Union Movement (1919–1923)', *Social Scientist* 8, 4 (1979), 23–36

Bose, Sugata, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006)

His Majesty's Opponent: Subhas Candra Bose and India's Struggle against Empire (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011)

Brar, J.S., *The Communist Party in Punjab: The Politics of Survival* (New Delhi: National Book Organization, 1989)

Broeze, Frank, 'The Muscles of Empire – Indian Seamen and the Raj, 1919–1939', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 18, 1 (1981), 43–67

Brown, Emily C., *Har Dayal: Hindu Revolutionary and Rationalist* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1975)

Brown, Judith M., *Global South Asians: Introducing the Modern Diaspora* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006)

Carr, E.H., *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917–1923*, vol. 3 (New York: W.W Norton, 1985)

Chakrabarty, Dipesh, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000)

Chandan, Amarjit, *Gopal Singh Chandan: A Short Biography and Memoirs*. The Punjabi Diaspora Series No. 4 (no place: Punjab Centre for Migration Studies Publication, 2004)

Chandra, Bipan (ed.), 'Marxism in India', *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 4, 4 (1974), 439–459

Chandra, Bipan *The Indian Left: Critical Appraisals* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1983)

Chase, William J., *Enemies within the Gates? The Comintern and the Stalinist Repression, 1934–1939* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001)

Chatterjee, Partha, 'The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question', in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds.), *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. 233–253

'Nationalism, Internationalism, and Cosmopolitanism: Some Observations from Modern Indian History', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 36, 2 (2016), 320–334

Chattopadhyay, Subhas Chandra, *Subhas Chandra Bose: Man, Mission, and Means* (Calcutta: Minerva Associates, 1989)

Chattopadhyay, Suchetana, *An Early Communist: Muzaffar Ahmad in Calcutta, 1913–1929* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2012)

Voices of Komagata Maru: Imperial Surveillance and Workers from Punjab in Bengal (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2019)

Chaturvedi, Vinayak, 'A Revolutionary's Biography: The Case of V.D. Savarkar', *Postcolonial Studies* 16, 2 (2013), 124–139

Chowdhry, Prem, 'Social Support Base and Electoral Politics: The Congress in Colonial Southeast Punjab', *Modern Asian Studies* 25, 4 (October 1991), 811–831

Chowdhuri, Satyabrata Rai, *Leftism in India, 1917–1947* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007)

Christiansen, Samantha, and Scarlett, Zachary A. (eds.), *The Third World in the Global 1960s* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012)

Deol, G.S., *The Role of the Ghadar Party in the National Movement* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1969)

Degras, Jane (ed.), *The Communist International 1919–1943, Documents*, 3 vols., vol. 1, *1919–1922* (London: Frank Cass, 1971)

Dewey, Clive, *The Mind of the Indian Civil Service* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996)

Dhamoon, Rita Kaur, et al. (eds.), *Unmooring the Komagata Maru: Charting Colonial Trajectories* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2019)

Dhulipala, Venkat, *Creating a New Medina: State Power, Islam, and the Quest for Pakistan in Late Colonial North India* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2015)

Druhe, D.N., *Soviet Russia and Indian Communism* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1959)

Dungen, P.H.M. van den, *The Punjab Tradition: Influence and Authority in Nineteenth-Century India* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1972)

Durantaye, Leland, *Giorgio Agamben: A Critical Introduction* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009)

Eksteins, Modris, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (New York: Mariner Books, 2000)

Elam, Daniel, 'Echoes of Ghadr: Lala Har Dayal and the Time of Anticolonialism', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 34, 1 (2014), 9–23

Fanon, Frantz, *Black Skins, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 2008, originally published in French, *Peau Noire, Masques Blanc*, 1952)

Wretched of the Earth (New York: Grove Press, 2005)

Fischer-Tiné, Harald, 'Indian Nationalism and the "World Forces": Transnational and Diasporic Dimensions of the Indian Freedom Movement on the Eve of the First World War', *Journal of Global History* 2 (2007), 325–344

Sanskrit, Sociology and Anti-Imperial Struggle: The Life of Shyamji Krishnavarma (1857–1930) (New Delhi: Routledge India, 2008)

Fraser, T.G., 'Germany and Indian Revolution, 1914–18', *Journal of Contemporary History* 12, 2 (1977), 255–272

Gajrani, S., *Peasant Movement in Punjab* (New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 1987)

Peasants and Princes: Agrarian Unrest in the East Punjab States, 1920–48 (New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 1987)
Gardezi, Hasan N. (ed.), *Chains to Lose: Life and Struggles of a Revolutionary – Memoirs of Dada Amir Haider Khan*, 2 vols. (New Delhi: Patriot Publishers, 1988)
Gaur, Ishwar D., *Martyr as Bridegroom: A Folk Representation of Bhagat Singh* (New Delhi: Anthem Press, 2008)
Gay, Peter, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York: W.W Norton, 2001)
Ghosh, Durba, *Gentlemanly Terrorists: Political Violence and the Colonial State in India, 1919–1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017)
'Revolutionary Women and Nationalist Heroes in Bengal, 1930 to the 1980s', *Gender & History* 25, 2 (2013), 355–375
Ghosh, Pramita, *Meerut Conspiracy Case and the Left Wing in India* (Calcutta: Papyrus, 1978)
Gilmartin, David, *Empire and Islam* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988)
'A Magnificent Gift: Muslim Nationalism and the Election Process in Colonial Punjab', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 40, 3 (July 1998), 415–436
Gopal, Priyamvada, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation and the Transition to Independence* (London: Routledge, 2005)
Gordin, Michael, Tilley, Helen, and Prakash, Gyan (eds.), *Utopia/Dystopia: Conditions of Historical Possibility* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010)
Goswami, Manu, 'Imaginary Futures and Colonial Internationalisms', *The American Historical Review* 117, 5 (2012), 1461–1485
Gould, Harold A., *Sikhs, Swamis, Students, and Spies: The India Lobby in the United States, 1900–1946* (New Delhi: Sage, 2006)
Grewal, J.S., Puri, Harish, and Banga, Indu (eds.), *The Ghadar Movement: Background, Ideology, Action, and Legacies* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 2014)
Guha, Ranajit, and Spivak, Gayatri C. (eds.), *Selected Subaltern Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988)
Gulati, Kailash C., *The Akalis, Past and Present* (New Delhi: Ashajanak Publications, 1974)
Gupta, D.N, *Communism and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1939–45* (New Delhi: Sage, 2008)
Gupta, Manmathnath, *History of the Indian Revolutionary Movement* (New Delhi: Somaiya Publications, 1972)
Gupta, Sobhanlal D., *Comintern, India, and the Colonial Question, 1920–37* (Calcutta: Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, 1980)
Comintern and the Destiny of Communism in India, 1919–1943: Dialectics of Real and a Possible History (Kolkata: Distributor Sreejoni, 2006)
Habib, Irfan, *To Make the Deaf Hear: Ideology and Programme of Bhagat Singh and His Comrades* (Gurgaon: Three Essays Collective, 2007)
Haithcox, John P., 'The Roy–Lenin Debate on Colonial Policy: A New Interpretation', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 23, 1 (1963), 93–101

'Nationalism and Communism in India: The Impact of the 1927 Comintern Failure in China', *Journal of Asian Studies* 24, 3 (1965), 459–473

'Left Wing Unity and the Indian Nationalist Movement: M.N. Roy and the Congress Socialist Party', *Modern Asian Studies* 3, 1 (1969), 17–56

Communism and Nationalism in India: M.N. Roy and Comintern Policy, 1920–1939 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971)

Hardt, Michael, 'Prison Time', *Yale French Studies* 91 (1997), 64–79

Hasan, Mushir-ul, 'Religion and Politics: The Ulama and Khilafat Movement', *Economic & Political Weekly* 16, 20 (May 1981), 903–912

Haslam, Jonathan, 'The Comintern and the Origins of the Popular Front 1934–1935', *The Historical Journal* 22, 3 (1979), 673–691

Hauner, Milan, 'One Man against the Empire: The Faqir of Ipi and the British in Central Asia on the Eve of and during the Second World War', *Journal of Contemporary History* (Sage) 16 (1981), 183–212

Heeger, Gerald A., 'The Growth of the Congress Movement in Punjab, 1920–1940', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 32, 1 (1972), 39–51

Hobsbawm, Eric, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994)

Horne, Gerald, *Paul Robeson: The Artist as Revolutionary* (London: Pluto Press, 2016)

Hughes, Langston, 'Harlem', in *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes* (New York: Random House , 1990), www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46548/harlem

Hussaini, Wajdi al, and Ali, Syed Abid, *Maulana Barkatullah Bhopali: Inqulabi Savanih* (Bhopal: Madhya Pradesh Urdu Academy, 1986)

Iber, Patrick, *Neither Peace nor Freedom: The Cultural Cold War in Latin America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015)

Jalal, Ayesha, 'The Convenience of Subservience: Women and the State of Pakistan', in Deniz Kandiyoti (ed.), *Women, Islam & the State* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1991), pp. 77–114

Jan, Ammar Ali, 'In the Shadow of Ghadar: Marxism and Anti-Colonialism in Colonial Punjab', *Socialist Studies / Études socialistes* 13, 2 (2018), 73–74

Javed, Ajeet, *Left Politics in Punjab, 1935–47* (New Delhi: Durga Publications, 1988)

Jeronimo, Miguel B., and Monteiro, Jose P., *Internationalism, Imperialism and the Formation of the Contemporary World: The Pasts of the Present* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018)

Johnston, Hugh, *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru: The Sikh Challenge to Canada's Colour Bar* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979)

Josh, Bhagwan, *Communist Movement in Punjab, 1926–47* (Delhi: Anupama Publications, 1979)

Josh, Bhagwan, and Joshi, Shashi, *Struggle for Hegemony in India, 1920–47: The Colonial State, the Left and the National Movement*, 3 vols. (New Delhi, London: Sage, 1992–94)

Kautsky, John H., *Moscow and the Communist Party of India: A Study in the Postwar Evolution of International Communist Strategy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1956)

Keys, Barbara, 'An African-American Worker in Stalin's Soviet Union: Race and the Soviet Experiment in International Perspective', *The Historian* 71, 1 (2009), 31–54

Khalid, Adeeb, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999)

Khan, Yasmin, *The Raj at War: A People's History of India's Second World War* (London: Bodley Head, 2015)

Koselleck, Reinhart, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004)

Kuracina, William F., '"Source Silver": An Informant, Collaboration and the Ambiguity of an Indian Socialist Ideal', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 40, 4, (2017), 744–762

Lalita, K., Kannabiran, V., and Melkote, Rama (eds.), *We Were Making History: Life Stories of Women in the Telengana People's Struggle* (London: Zed Books, 1990)

Lee, Christopher J., *The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2010)

Lee, Harold, *Brothers in the Raj: The Lives of John and Henry Lawrence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)

Legg, Stephen, *Prostitution and the Ends of Empire: Scale, Governmentalities, and Interwar India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014)

Leghari, Abdullah *Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi ki Sarguzasht-e-Kabul* (Islamabad: Qaumi Idarah bara-e-Tehqiq-i-Tarikh, 1980)

Loomba, Ania, *Revolutionary Desires: Women, Communism, and Feminism in India* (London: Routledge, 2019)

Louro, Michele, *Comrades against Imperialism: Nehru, India and Interwar Internationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018)

Louro, Michele, and Stolte, Carolien, 'The Meerut Case in Comparative and International Perspective', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 33, 3 (2013), 310–315

MacKinnon, Janice, and MacKinnon, Stephen, *Agnes Smedley: The Life and Times of an American Radical* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988)

Maclean, Kama, *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India: Violence, Image, Voice and Text* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014)

'Revolution and Revelation, or, When Is History Too Soon?', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 39, 3 (2016), 678–694

Maclean, Kama, and Elam, Daniel, 'Reading Revolutionaries – Texts, Acts, and Afterlives of Political Action in Late Colonial South Asia', *Postcolonial Studies* 16, 2 (2013), 113–123

Maclean, Kama, Elam, Daniel, and Moffat, Chris (eds.), *Writing Revolution in South Asia: History, Practice, Politics* (London: Routledge, 2017)

Maitra, Kiran, *Marxism in India: From Decline to Debacle* (New Delhi: Roli Books, 2012)

Major, Andrew J., *Return to Empire: Punjab under the Sikhs and British in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1996)

Makalini, Minkah, *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917–1939* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011)

Manela, Erez, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)

Manjapra, Kris, *M.N. Roy: Marxism and Colonial Cosmopolitanism* (New Delhi: Routledge India, 2010)

Age of Entanglement: German and Indian Intellectuals across Empire (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014)

Manjapra, Kris, and Bose, Sugata (eds.), *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones: South Asia and the Global Circulation of Ideas* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010)

Mannheim, Karl, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954)

Marik, Soma, 'Breaking Through a Double Invisibility', *Critical Asian Studies* 45, 1 (2013), 79–118

Matera, Marc, and Kent, Susan K., *The Global 1930s: The International Decade* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017)

Mawani, Renisa, *Across Oceans of Law: The Komagata Maru and Jurisdiction in the Time of Empire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018)

McAdams, A. James, *Vanguard of the Revolution: The Global Idea of the Communist Party* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017)

McDermott, Kevin, and Agnew, Jeremy, *The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996)

McKenzie, Kermit E., *Comintern and World Revolution, 1928–1943: The Shaping of a Doctrine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964)

Menon, Dilip, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India: Malabar, 1900–1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)

Metcalf, Thomas, *Forging the Raj: Essays on British India in the Heyday of Empire* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005)

Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860–1920 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008)

Mickenberg, Julia L., *American Girls in Red Russia: Chasing the Soviet Dream* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017)

Minault, Gail, *The Kilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982)

Mishra, Pankaj, *From the Ruins of Empire: The Intellectuals Who Remade Asia* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2012)

Moffat, Chris, 'Bhagat Singh's Corpse', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 39, 3 (2016), 644–661

India's Revolutionary Inheritance: Politics and the Promise of Bhagat Singh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019)

Mujahid, Sharif-al, '1945–46 Elections and Pakistan: Punjab's Pivotal Role', *Journal of Pakistan Vision* 11, 1 (2010), 1–11 [Pakistan Study Centre, University of Punjab]

Mukherjee, Mridula, *Peasants in India's Non-Violent Revolution: Practice and Theory* (London: Sage, 2003)

Nair, Janaki, 'Imperial Reason, National Honour and New Patriarchal Compacts in Early Twentieth-Century India', *History Workshop Journal* 66, 1 (2008), 208–226

Nair, Neeti, 'Bhagat Singh as "Satyagrahi": The Limits to Non-Violence in Late Colonial India', *Modern Asian Studies* 43, 3 (2009), 649–681

Changing Homelands: Hindu Politics and the Partition of India (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011)

Oberoi, Harjot, 'Ghadar Movement and Its Anarchist Genealogy', *Economic & Political Weekly* XLIV, 50 (2009), 40–46

O'Malley, Kate, *Ireland, India and Empire: Indo-Irish Radical Connections, 1919–64* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008)

Omissi, David, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860–1940* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994)

Overstreet, Gene D., and Windmiller, Marshall, *Communism in India* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1959)

Owen, N., *The British Left and India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)

Patil, V.S., *Subhas Chandra Bose: His Contribution to Indian Nationalism* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1988)

Pearce, Brian (trans.), *Congress of the Peoples of the East, Baku September 1920 (Stenographic Report)* (London: New Park Publications, 1977)

Persits, M.A, *Revolutionaries of India in Soviet Russia: Mainsprings of the Communist Movement in the East* (translated from the Russian by Lev Bobrov, originally published in 1973) (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1983)

Petersson, Fredrik, 'The "Colonial Conference" and Dilemma of the Comintern's Colonial Work, 1928–29', in Vijay Prashad (ed.), *Communist Histories,* vol. 1 (Delhi: LeftWord Books, 2016)

Plowman, Matthew E., 'The British Intelligence Station in San Francisco During the First World War', *Journal of Intelligence History* 12 (2013), 1–20

Popplewell, Richard J., *Intelligence and Imperial Defence: British Intelligence and the Defence of the Indian Empire 1904–1924* (London: Frank Cass, 1995)

Porter, Cathy, *Alexandra Kollontai: A Biography* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2014)

Prashad, Vijay, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2007)

Prashad, Vijay (ed.), *Communist Histories,* vol. 1 (Delhi: LeftWord Books, 2016)

Priestland, David, *The Red Flag: A History of Communism* (New York: Grove Press, 2009)

Puri, Harish, *Ghadar Movement: Ideology, Organisation & Strategy* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University Press, 1983)

Ghadar Movement, and *Ghadar Party: Its Role in India's Struggle for Freedom* (New Delhi: Communist Party of India, 1997)

Ghadar Movement: A Short History (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 2011)

Ramnath, Maia, *Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadar Movement Charted Global Radicalism and Attempted to Overthrow the British Empire* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011)

Rasul, M.A., *A History of the All Indian Kisan Sabha* (Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1974)

Raza, Ali, 'Separating the Wheat from the Chaff: Meerut and the Creation of "Official" Communism in India', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 33, 3 (2013), 316–330

'The Illusory Promise of Freedom: Mian Iftikhar-ud-Din and the Movement for Pakistan', in Ali Usman Qasmi and Megan Robb (eds.), *Muslims against the Muslim League* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2017)

'Dispatches from Havana: The Cold War, Afro-Asian Solidarities, and Culture Wars in Pakistan', *Journal of World History* 30, 1&2 (2019)

Raza, Ali, Roy, Franziska, and Zachariah, Benjamin, *The Internationalist Moment: South Asia, Worlds, and World Views, 1917–39* (New Delhi: Sage, 2014)

Rees, Tim, and Thorpe, Andrew (eds.), *International Communism and the Communist International 1919–43* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998)

Reetz, Dietrich, *Hijrat: The Flight of the Faithful. A British File on the Exodus of Muslim Peasants from North India to Afghanistan in 1920* (Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 1995)

Riddell, John, Prashad, Vijay, and Mollah, Nazeef, *Liberate the Colonies! Communism and Colonial Freedom 1917–1924* (New Delhi: LeftWord Books, 2019)

Robinson, Cedric, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000)

Roy, Anjali Gera, *Imperialism and Sikh Migration: The Komagata Maru Incident* (London: Routledge, 2018)

Roy, Franziska, Liebau, Heike, and Ahuja, Ravi (eds.), *When the War Began, We Heard of Several Things: Prisoners of War in First World War Germany* (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2011)

Saikia, Yasmin, '*Hijrat* and *Azadi* in Indian Muslim Imagination and Practice Connecting Nationalism, Internationalism, and Cosmopolitanism', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 37, 2 (2017), 201–212

Saiyid, Dushka, *Muslim Women of the British Punjab: From Seclusion to Politics* (London: Macmillan Press, 1998)

Sarkar, Sumit, 'The Communists and 1942', *Social Scientist* 12, 9 (1984), 45–53

Writing Social History (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998)

Sarkar, Tanika, 'Nationalist Iconography: Image of Women in 19th Century Bengali Literature', *Economic & Political Weekly* 22, 47 (1987), 2011–2015

Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001)

Sarwar, Muhammad, *Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi* (Lahore: Sindh Sagar Academy, 1976)

Saunders, Francis Stonor, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: The New Press, 2001)

Scott, David, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004)

'Black Futurities Past and Present: Thinking Reparations Through', Lecture, Colonial Repercussions/Koloniales Erbe Symposium III (Planetary Utopias – Hope, Desire, Imaginaries in a Post-Colonial World), Akademie der Künste, Berlin, 23 June 2018

Scott-Smith, Giles, and Lerg, Charlotte A. (eds.), *Campaigning Culture and the Global Cold War: The Journals of the Congress for Cultural Freedom* (London: Macmillan Publishers, 2017)

Service, Robert, *Comrades! A History of World Communism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010)

Seth, Sanjay, *Marxist Theory and Nationalist Politics: The Case of Colonial India* (New Delhi: Sage, 1995)

Shah, Sonal, *Indian Socialists: Search for Identity* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1994)

'Indian Socialists and Their Legacy', *Economic & Political Weekly* 51, 43 (2016)

Sharma, Shalini, 'Developing a Communist Identity: The Case of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha', *Journal of Punjab Studies* 14, 2 (2007), 167–187

Radical Politics in the Punjab: Governance and Sedition (Oxford, New York: Routledge, 2010)

Sherwood, Marika, 'The Comintern, the CPGB, Colonies and Black Britons, 1920–1938', *Science & Society* 60, 2 (1996), 137–163

Sidhu, Ajmer, *From Ghadar to Naxalbari: Baba Bujha Singh, An Untold Story* (Barnala: Tark Bharti Parkashan, 2013)

Singh, Gajendra, *Between Self and Sepoy: The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014)

Singh, Gurharpal, *Communism in Punjab: A Study of the Movement up to 1967* (New Delhi: Ajanta Publications 1994)

Singh, Mohinder, *The Akali Movement* (New Delhi: Macmillan, 1978)

Peasant Movement in PEPSU, Punjab (New Delhi: National Book Organization, 1991)

Singh, Mohinder, and Gulati, Kailash C., *The Akalis, Past and Present* (New Delhi: Ashajanak Publications, 1974)

Singh, Raghbir, *Akali Movement, 1926–1947* (New Delhi: Omsons Publications, 1997)

Singh, Ranjit (ed.), *Sikh Achievers* (New Delhi: Hemkunt Publishers, 2008)

Singh, Sunit, 'Echoes of Freedom: Indian Radicals and the Socialist International, 1905–1920' (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2018)

Sinha, Mrinalini, Guy, Donna, and Woollacott, Angela, *Feminisms and Internationalism* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 1999)

Slate, Nico, *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012)

Slezkine, Yuri, *House of Government: A Saga of the Russian Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017)

Sluga, Glenda, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013)

Sluga, Glenda, and Clavin, Patricia (eds.), *Internationalisms: A Twentieth Century History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016)

Sohi, Seema, *Echoes of Mutiny: Race, Surveillance, and Indian Anticolonialism in North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014)

Stolte, Carolien, '"Enough of the Great Napoleons!" Raja Mahendra Pratap's Pan-Asian projects (1929–1939)', *Modern Asian Studies* 46, 2 (2012), 403–423

Studer, Brigitte, *The Transnational World of the Cominternians* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015)
Talbot, Ian, *Khizr Tiwana, the Punjab Unionist Party and the Partition of India* (London: Routledge, 1996)
Tan, Tai Yong, 'Maintaining the Military Districts: Civil–Military Integration and District Soldiers' Boards in the Punjab, 1919–1939', *Modern Asian Studies* 28, 4 (1994), 833–874
'Assuaging the Sikhs: Government Responses to the Akali Movement, 1920–1925', *Modern Asian Studies* 29, 3 (1995), 655–703
The Garrison State: The Military, Government and Society in Colonial Punjab 1849–1947 (New Delhi, London: Sage, 2005)
Tatla, Darshan S., *The Sikh Diaspora: The Search for Statehood* (London: UCL Press, 1999)
A Guide to Sources, Ghadar Movement (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 2003)
Thapar-Bjorkert, Suruchi, *Women in the Indian National Movement: Unseen Faces and Unheard Voices, 1930–42* (New Delhi: Sage, 2006)
Toor, Sadia, *State of Islam: Culture and Cold War Politics in Pakistan* (London: Pluto Press, 2011)
Traverso, Enzo, *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History, and Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016)
Van den Dungen, P.H.M., *The Punjab Tradition: Influence and Authority in Nineteenth-Century India* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1972)
Vas, Eric A., *Subhas Chandra Bose: The Man and His Times* (New Delhi: Lancer Publishers, 2005)
Vyas, Anju. and Sharma, Ratna (eds.), *Indian Women: Biographies and Autobiographies (An Annotated Bibliography)* (New Delhi: Centre for Women's Development Studies, 2013)
Walia, Ramesh, *Praja Mandal Movement in East Punjab States* (Patiala: Department of Punjab Historical Studies, Punjabi University, 1972)
Wilder, Gary, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015)
White, Stephen, *The Bolshevik Poster* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990)
Zachariah, Benjamin, 'A Long, Strange Trip: The Lives in Exile of Har Dayal', *South Asian History and Culture* 4, 4 (2013), 574–592
'Global Fascisms and the Volk: The Framing of Narratives and the Crossing of Lines', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 38, 4 (2015), 608–612
Zaheer, Hasan, *The Times and Trial of the Rawalpindi Conspiracy 1951: The First Coup Attempt in Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998)

Index