

Bhai Sahib & The Jatha's Role in the Gadar Revolt

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I was born in July 1895 to Sd. Fateh Singh and Mata Bholee in village Chavindaa Dist. Ludhiana. After passing the 8th grade in 1911, I enrolled in the Junior Class of the Khalsa High School in Ludhiana. My father had died in 1909 at a young age, and I studied in Ludhiana under the guidance of my elder brother. It was here that I found the love of Sikhi. I spent most of my time in a private rented house in FieldGanj. Once a week on the Wednesday, the school had a keertan in which Bhai Sahib Randheer Singh jee used to do keertan. I, like the other children developed the enthusiasm to do keertan, so I began to accompany the Jatha to the villages and enjoyed bliss like this. So in 1914 I received amrit at an amrit sinchaar organized by the Jatha. The Rehits were all very tough and my family began to bother me, so I left home and began to travel with the Jatha.

In the ninth grade, I left school and at the same time the Komagata Maru incident took place as did the destruction of the wall of Gurduara RakaabGanj by the British Government. These incidents filled the Jatha with zeal. At this time, members of the Gadar Party had arrived in India from America after having taken vows to raise a revolution. Thousands of these members were thrown in jail and only a few whirlwind workers were left who continued their mission. They went to the army, Gurduaras, Mandars and schools to encourage the people with these words, "Come, now is the time for revolution. Let us throw the British out of our country and free our State."

In this regard, they had established links in many Army Cantonments. Soldiers from Mamlan, Faizalaabad, Ravalpindi, Lahore, Ferozepur, etc. were prepared to fight for freedom with these Gadar workers. The British were only in the Thousands in all of Hindustan. Even though the Congress leaders did not help these brave workers, they were still so successful that if soldier Kirpal Singh had not become an informer, the revolution would have been succeeded. But Kirpal Singh informed and the Police became aware. I have myself read the news that the Command Officer in Ravalpindi kept the cannons on top of the fort at the ready and in the morning asked forgiveness from his soldiers saying, "I had a suspicion about the Sikhs...so because of this, I kept the cannons at the ready. Now I ask for forgiveness, that I suspected you for nothing." But saying this was his cleverness. This happened in every place, and due to Kirpal Singh's information, the British even threw out some soldiers.

In this regard, Gadar Party members, Baba Nidhaan Singh, Bh. Uttam Singh, Eeshar Singh, Rangaa Singh, Baba Gurmukh Singh, Sd. Kartaar Singh Sarabha, Sd. Boota Singh AkaalGaR, Bhai Gaa(n)dhaa Singh, Arjan Singh KhukhraaNaa, etc. all used to come to Bhai Randheer Singh in Narangvaal. At first, Bhai Arjan Singh KhukhraaNaa came to Bhai Sahib Randheer Singh's home and read some poetry from "Gadar Dee Goonj", which I wrote down and memorised and to this day still remember. At that time, reading those poems gave a lot of passion. The reader almost became crazy. I would openly read these poems to those sitting in rich houses and working farmers and at all times I would remain in "joash" (passion/zeal/rage). The villagers used to say "These people are going to end up like the Kookas" (the Kookas also started a movement against the British but were suppressed badly. Many were executed and others were deported).

Bhai Arjan Singh KhukhraaNaa told us that in Malva, Bhai Randheer Singh's Jathas and in Majha, Baba Javand Singh jee's horse-riding Jathas were all prepared to die for this cause. In these days, there was so much zeal in the Jathas that there were secret meetings in Lohatbudee, Gujjarvaal, DhanDaaree, Narangval and Khanna, etc. in which Bhai Sahib Randheer Singh, Bhai Attar Singh, Bhai Daleep Singh, Bhai SurjaN Singh, Baba Raam Singh and I would all attend. In the big divaan at Langay Mandee Lahore and others, Bhai Sahib's Jatha took part with full force. All of Ludhiana's teachers, lawyers and prominent personalities attended the Langay Mandee divaan due to Bhai Sahib's encouragement and it was due to Bhai Sahib that Mahinder Singh Mansooraa(n) became president of the Langay Mandee Divaan.

Seeing Ludhiana's enthusiasm for this movement, that time's Governor in a conference, said that "the People of this town should not be misguided. They should follow their leaders (i.e. the Loyalist traitors)." The devotee of the British, Sardar Bhadar Gajjan Singh Narangvaal said "We wanted to make this conference a big affair, but some crazy brothers (i.e. the revolutionaries) have forced us to keep it small."

At this point, because of Bhai Randher Singh's revolutionary brothers' agitation, the District was thrown into crisis, but despite this, some people still preach that Bhai Sahib was exclusively religious and had no association with the Freedom movement or regime change. So, to destroy this false propoganda, for the knowledge of the common people, I write my true personally seen and experienced account which will show what role Bhai Sahib played with the Gadar-Revolutionaries and in throwing off British rule.

The date for the revolution had been set for February 21, 1915 at 12 midnight. At this time, individuals in each district and in each Cantonment would come together, take up arms and would start the revolution. Because Kirpaal Singh informed of this date, the leaders changed the date to February 19, 1915. This change was made known secretly from place to place.

Kartaar Singh Sarabha and Bhai Sahib had the duty of going to Ferozepur, getting arms from the soldiers there and attacking the fort. Because of this, Kartaar Singh personally met Bhai Sahib on the pathway from village Gill to DhanDaaree. Kartaar Singh knew the Jatha would pass by this spot, so he arrived there in advance. When the Jatha arrived, he met Bhai Sahib and told him that due to Kirpal Singh's treachery, the date of the revolution had been changed from the 21st to the 19th. At this time, Bhai Sahib asked Kartaar Singh a lot of questions and he too gave quite a few instructions. For example, Bhai Sahib asked how many cars were available to which Kartaar Singh replied that the cars were in the towns, which would be all disposable for the revolution. Kartaar Singh also said, "The soldiers are with us. Don't bring any weapons with you, we'll get them all there (at Ferozepur) when we arrive."

But Bhai Sahib said, "The battle-axe (safaajang), chakar and kirpaan that we always have, will definitely remain with us. Beyond that, whatever you give us, we'll take."

Kartaar Singh then said "On a bright moonlit night, a black turban can be spotted easily, so take off your black turbans." But Bhai Sahib said "Our weapons, clothes and turbans will remain as they are. They cannot be taken off."

After this discussion, Kartaar Singh left and before leaving, received a pat on his back from Bhai Sahib and the Jatha left for Chhotee DhanDaaree. This happened on February 14, 1915.

After going to DhanDaaree, an akhand paath saahib took place which concluded on February 17th. After this, a close-door meeting took place in which Bhai Sahib placed the issue of going to Ferozepur on the 19th and joining the soldiers for revolution before the sangat. Bhai Surjan Singh opposed this move, that the Khalsa has no business with issues of the regime and shouldn't go. But Bhai Sahib in a special way said "we have no desire for ruling, but the British tore down the wall of our Gurdvara (RakaabGanj) and this job is to give our country freedom from this slavery, so we should definitely go and fight against the British rule."

Then what? A resolution was passed in this favour and all were instructed to go to Bhai Sahib's house in Narangvaal on February 19th, and all would assemble there.

As per the decision at DhanDaaree, from the morning of February 19th, the Sangat began to arrive at Narangvaal. Guru Saahib was parkaash. The Shaheedee Fauj (those going for martyrdom) all appeared before the Punj Pyaaray and had their mistakes forgiven. Limitless Karah Parshaad degh was distributed. Because of Kartaar Singh's words on the black turbans, a 40 Yard roll of khaki cloth was brought and a yard each was given to everyone. All were instructed that when they entered battle, they should tie this cloth over their dastaars so the black dastaar did not become a target for bullets.

After noon-time, the Sangat did a Shaheedee ardaas and left from Mulaa(n)pur station. On the way, Bhai Uttam Singh, Eeshar Singh and Rangaa Singh were also met. The train was to leave around 6pm. When we got to the train platform, Kishan Singh Zaildaar was getting off a train from Ludhiana. He knew both me and Bhai Sahib. Because of his testimony, we would later get jail sentences and as a reward for this, he was given a large allotment of land. The day he got the order for the land reward, that same day he had a son born in his house. He considered his newborn son to be lucky, so he named his "Khushkismat" or "lucky"(This son in the past has been the district president for the Congress party).

We got on the train and left for Ferozepur Cantonment. On the way, all we did was keertan of Chaupaiee Saahib. There was such an effect on the Sangat to become martyred and free the country that all were openly and care-freely, singing. The revolutionaries also left, reading "Gadar Dee Goonj."

On the way, at Moga and Jagraon, Singhs kept joining us. The Jatha grew to about 40 or 50 members. When we arrived at the Cantonment, the Jatha got off the train, and Kartaar Singh was waiting to greet us. He led us through the British barracks, into the place where the battle would take place. This place was sandy and deserted. Kartaar Singh had us sit down and himself returned to the fort. At this place, 150-200 people had gathered. For quite a while, Kartaar Singh did not return, and in this state, the revolutionaries became so impatient, that while clutching their revolvers they kept saying "the time has come. It's not twelve, it's now 1AM, but why is no one issuing the orders?" Bhai Gaa(n)dhaa Singh, standing beside me was saying these words, but Kartaar Singh not returning was making all the revolutionaries very anxious. Finally, after 1AM, Kartaar Singh returned after walking around the Cantonment, and with pain-filled words he said, "Brothers, those soldiers who were to give us weapons and ammunition have been taken out of the Cantonment for quite a few days now and taken somewhere unknown. Our gathering here, weapon-less as we are, is of no sense. So, however you can, disperse." Hearing this, all the revolutionaries and the Singhs present to give their shaheedee were completely devastated, and all dispersed in frustration.

Then, for the rest of the night, we stayed in a hut, and early in the morning by way of Feemaa, we went to Naamak Station and returned to Mulaa(n)pur and from here, we returned to our houses.

After many months, on June 21st, due to the information provided by government-witness/approver Bhagat Singh, raids were suddenly conducted in Gujjarval, Falovaal, Narangvaal and Chamindaa. After the searches, we were taken into custody. After being taken to Ludhiana, I and Surjan Singh, fearing being forced to become approvers, ran away from the police station when everyone was out to eat dinner. We stayed away from our homes for five or six months and roamed around in Hoshiarpur, Anandpur, Ludhiana, Patiala and Nabha. Raam Singh, a Nanbardaar of Javadee, took me and Bhai Daleep Singh Fulayvaal to Rampuraa-Fool station and had us arrested from there. We were brought back to Ludhiana and after two days, we were sent to jail. On October 28, 1915, we and forty or fifty others were transferred to Lahore.

In Lahore, our court case went on for five months. In the end, six were given the death sentence, about 40 were given deportation to Kaalaa-PaaNee, and a few (four or five) were given three year prison terms. I was sentenced to life in prison i.e. Kaalaa-PaaNee, and all my property was seized. This decision later was changed to three years imprisonment. I endured this entire sentence and was released on two bail warrants, so I could live on the outskirts of my village.