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POETIC POLITICS

From Ghadar to the Indian Workers Association

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Sentiments which are typical of a half-educated Ghadar Revolutionary, in which words aspire to the Ghadar poetical compositions in which truth is subordinate to the flow of language.

(British official on the pronouncements of Udham Singh, after his capture in London after shooting Michael O'Dwyer in 1940¹)

On a bitterly cold afternoon, on a small patch of grass opposite the Indian High Commission offices located in Birmingham, the amplified, nasal tones of male Punjabi voices cut through the dull grey skyline with fiery speeches condemning the actions of the Bharatiya Janata party government. The event was organised by the Indian Workers Association (GB) (IWA) in association with the Anti-Caste Alliance (UK) and a range of other progressive, diasporic organisations. The suicide of Rohith Vemula in Hyderabad in the previous week (February 2016) had motivated not only this demonstration, but one week before, a similar event outside the Indian High Commission in London.² While the gathering was relatively small (around fifty people, mostly men, entirely Indian, predominantly Punjabi), the bright red banner boldly announced in Gurmukhi Punjabi and English: "Bharti Mazdoor Sabha (Great Britain), Est. 1938." Almost eighty years on from its hagiographical origins and even though the mobilising power of this now multiply splintered organisation, the IWA, has diminished, the fact of its existence reflects the continuing transnational connections that the Indian diaspora maintains and sustains. By offering an insight into the ideological and organisational praxis of the IWA, the primary aim of this chapter is to draw out and highlight the ways in which continuities are drawn between that organisation and the Ghadar party. This movement began in California in 1914 and lasted as an organisation until 1917, when it was banned in India, though its influence permeated throughout the twentieth century, not least in providing inspiration to the formation of the IWA in Britain in 1938. The opening lines to this chapter provide an example of the way in which any form of anti-colonial, radical activity was almost always folded into a historiography that led to the Ghadars. Indeed, one of the continuities that this chapter will highlight is the way in which poetry was a mode of expression that links North America to Britain and the Ghadar party to the IWA.

Although academic and popular writings on the Ghadars (Puri, 1983; Ramnath, 2011) and IWA (see Josephides, 1991; Gill, 2013) have covered the history of the organisations, there has been less focus on the interconnections and ideational continuities between the two. These broader overlapping agendas are best represented in the biographies of key figures such

as Bhagat Singh Bilga and Udham Singh, who offer an insight into the ways in which Ghadar inspired and provided organisational context for left wing organisation through the twentieth century. The chapter also offers an appreciation of the poetry of the Ghadarites and the IWA, as this often avoids the more intricate and derivative aspects of their debates which occupy much of the official documentation and prose produced by both movements. In that sense, this chapter uses poetry and biography as vehicles to journey through diasporic experience and political organising. Poetry as a form of political articulation was confusing to the colonial authorities as the opening quote from the British officer writing about Udham Singh clearly illustrates. Poetry also offers an insight into the key issues of religion and racism which in their own different ways were prominent themes addressed by Ghadarites and Indian Workers.

Ghadar generations

If anyone asks who we are
Tell him our name is rebel
Our duty is to end the tyranny [of colonial rule]
Our profession is to launch revolution
That is our *namaz*, this is our *sandhya*
Our *puja*, our worship
This is our religion
Our work
This is our only *Khuda*, our only *Rama*.

Kartar Singh Sarabha³

The centenary of the founding of the Ghadar party in California was marked in 2014 and multiple celebrations and commemorations took place from Vancouver to Visakhapatnam. The Ghadars were predominantly Punjabi migrants from relatively impoverished rural backgrounds who travelled to California in search of economic betterment. In the wake of the 1906 Land Alienation Act, the Punjab peasantry continued to suffer loss of landholdings and thus a main source of livelihood. The pressure to migrate was therefore acute in those same years when labour was in demand in agriculture and lumbering in California and British Columbia. What is still most remarkable about the formation of the Ghadar party is the way in which migration and the experiences of hardship combined with racism developed a consciousness that transcended the particular. For some this took the shape of an anti-colonial nationalism (Puri, 1983), for others a Sikh consciousness (Tatla, 2013) and, perhaps most significantly for the present chapter, a radical politics that was rooted in a migrant and anti-colonial consciousness. It is this dual focus that is at the heart of the connections between the Ghadar movement and the IWA.

The transnational material relations that underpin the diasporic consciousness of left wing activists consistently rekindle the symbolic potency of Ghadar through the twentieth and into the twenty-first century. Even though the party was banned in India in 1917, with many of its members either executed, sent to exile or imprisoned, the inspiration it provided was manifest and multiple. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the Ghadar party was at the root of radical politics in the Punjab (Kalra & Sharma, 2015). Kartar Singh Sarabha provided direct inspiration to Bhagat Singh, who was central to the formation of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association. In this vein, the Kirti Kisan party and ultimately the Communist Party of India share personnel and certainly revolutionary zeal with the Ghadars. In the specific context of the Punjab, the Akali movement and the more militant Babbar Akalis draw their leadership and courage, if not their ideology, from the Ghadars. Indeed, even the Khilafat movement and

the more left wing edges of the Ahrar stem from that radical tradition. It should not therefore be a surprise that their influence was also present in the diaspora where they had begun.

A shopfront in Handsworth, Birmingham, England, (the headquarters of the IWA posing as the Shaheed Udham Singh Welfare Centre) is regularly adorned with the flag of the Ghadar party. Its imagery consists of two crossed swords against three solid rectangles of vivid colour: red (for Hindus), orange (for Sikhs) and green (for Muslims).⁴ Looking out on the post-industrial landscape of Birmingham, the Ghadar flag not only symbolises historical continuities but also the ongoing struggles of migrant communities to settle into a hostile society. Ghadar's intensity does not lessen in a place like Handsworth, where irregular migrants mingle with groups of refugees, no longer dominated by Punjabis, but still confronted with the perennial issues of state harassment and settler scorn. The Shaheed Udham Singh Welfare Centre was opened in 1978 as a place to offer advice on issues of concern to migrants in the local area, but also to provide a base for the political/social activities of the IWA. The name of the centre is in honour of a figure in British-Indian history who also came to symbolise the way in which resistance to colonialism was not just about actions on Indian soil.

Udham Singh (aka Muhammed Singh Azad, to indicate both freedom and communal unity) was born in British colonial Punjab around the turn of the twentieth century and raised in an Amritsar orphanage. He served in the British Army in Mesopotamia and East Africa, worked on the Uganda Railway, and then sailed to the United States via Mexico. After working for seven years in California, Detroit, Chicago and New York, he signed on as a seaman and carpenter for an American shipping line under a Puerto Rican nomen of "Frank Brazil" and travelled extensively throughout Europe and the Mediterranean.⁵ He finally disembarked in India in 1927, only to be arrested shortly thereafter. He was first fined in Karachi for alleged possession of obscene postcards, and then in Amritsar under the Arms Act for possession of unlicensed weapons, including "two revolvers, one pistol, a quantity of ammunition and copies of the prohibited paper, *Ghadr-di-Gunj*". The police reported: "While in America he appears to have come under the influence of Ghadar Party and to have been affected by its teaching." Over the years he had made the acquaintance of Lajpat Rai, Kishan Singh and the latter's son Bhagat Singh, "whom he considered his guru and 'his best friend'" (Singh & Jouhl, 2002, 142).

In March 1940, at a meeting of the East India Association and the Royal Central Asiatic Society taking place in Caxton Hall, London, Udham Singh shot Sir Michael O'Dwyer, the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab at the time of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of April 1913, where hundreds were killed and many more injured.⁶ Udham Singh was arrested and the details of his trial are documented in some detail in the book *Emergence of the Image* (2002), which is based on documents released by the British government under the fifty-year rule.⁷ The trial of Udham Singh took place in June 1940 and it was used by him as an opportunity to voice his opposition to British imperialism and to connect his own impending execution with that of Bhagat Singh (Singh & Jouhl, 2002, 45). He was hanged in Pentonville Jail at the end of July 1940, where his body remains buried.

Ghadar to IWA

The formation of the IWA in Coventry from 1938 onwards has been very well detailed by Gill (2011) where he draws on interview material to provide the link between Ghadar and the IWA. In an interview with the poet Ajmer Bains, the formation of the group is described as follows:

He [Chima] came to Coventry and he said he brought the message [from Rattan Singh, a Ghadar rebel living in Europe] . . . Anyway, the point I was making is that

they didn't start the organisation by the same name as in Canada, Ghadar Party Movement. They said this will go with you and at least try to give it a different name and they called it the Indian Workers' Association.

(Gill, 2011, 88)

Workers' associations arose as pre-party organisations throughout Europe in the late nineteenth century, often as fronts for fledgling communist parties to represent workers outside of the trade union movement. Thus it was appropriate in the context of imperial Britain, and because the Communist party in India was banned, that this group would form under the mantle of an association. In a recent analysis of intelligence reports of the pre-war period, Ahmed (2012, 75) notes that the IWA attracted interest due to its connection with workers: "The [IWA] is essentially a working-class movement which makes no serious attempt to attract the Indian intelligentsia or the English sympathiser." The narratives in these reports of migrants' responses chime with those about the Ghadars:

[t]here are several examples in government reports of cases where Indians, from both privileged and modest backgrounds, refused conscription precisely on the grounds of "Indian nationalism," arguing that 'they should not be expected to join the British Armed Forces while India remain enslaved.'

(Ahmed, 2012, 78)

It is the materiality of living life as a migrant that connects Ghadar to the IWA along with these ideological moorings. Historical-spatial connections to the Punjab as well as the continuing occupation of India provide further connections in this period.

If there is any need for more evidence of the continuities in diasporic organising instantiated by the Ghadar party, then the long life of Bhagat Singh Bilga (1907–2009) stands as a metonym of the relationship. He is a figure of significant historic importance who provides an apt example of the way in which the Ghadar movement itself was inherently transnational, and also how this became routed through and localised in places like Birmingham.

Bilga was raised in the heady political climate of early twentieth-century Punjab, where the mobilisations of the Akali movement and the *Jaito Morcha* provided an opportunity for village boys to engage with the outside world.⁸ In the heartland of Doaba village Bilga saw six Ghadarites who left for America and, upon their return, were either arrested or hanged. Bilga was politicised in this atmosphere and by the time he set off on his journey to the Americas (hoping to study in Canada or the USA), he was already politically aware (Gill, 2008). He landed up in Argentina in 1931, and it was there that, along with the other Indian migrants, he organised workers under the banner of the Ghadar party, ultimately becoming the General Secretary of the group. Though the Argentinian migrants had not gone back to India when the Ghadars made their call to return, they were also not subject to the same state surveillance as those in Canada. It was in Argentina that Bilga met with Bhagat Singh's uncle, Ajit Singh, who further confirmed his convictions that independence from Britain would only be worthy if it resulted in a social state. It is this communist outlook that remained with Bilga throughout his life.

As the party in Argentina became more established and linked into the international communist movement, its President, Bhai Rattan Singh, proposed that core members should go to the Eastern University in Moscow for training in revolutionary insurgency (Gill, 2008). The years 1932–1934 were ones of relative ease for Bilga and his comrades; having come from a peasant and then hard labour background, the opportunity to be students was a luxury. Upon his return to India, from the mid-1930s to the early 1960s Baba Bilga was a central figure in the

Kirti Kisan party and the Indian Communist party in Punjab. Before decolonisation, he spent much of his time in jail and organising against British rule. After the formation of India, he remained a staunch communist and continued the struggle for a more equal society. Like so many from the Doaba region of Punjab, his sons migrated to England and thus from the 1970s onwards Baba Bilga was a frequent visitor to Birmingham and actively participated in the events and activities of the IWA there.

Beyond providing a personal connection between the Ghadar and the IWA, Baba Bilga's history provides an equally substantive and material link through his involvement in the creation of the Desh Bhagat Yaadgar Hall (Martyrs Memorial Hall) in Jalandhar. Following the banning of the Ghadar party in India, one of its supporters, Baba Vasakha Singh, who had himself been active in the Sikh Central League in Amritsar, set up the Desh Bhagat Parwarik Sahaik Committee, which translates as the Committee for the Welfare of the Families of Those Who Were Beloved of the Nation. The aim of the organisation was to provide money and provisions for the families of the Ghadar party members who had either been killed or were in jail. In 1938 this provision was reformed as the Desh Bhagat Yaadgar Committee (Committee for the Memory of the Beloved of the Nation). One member of that committee and a crucial link in the movement's transnational connections and diasporic communist consciousness was Bhagat Singh Bilga.

In his later years Bilga devoted himself to collecting the histories of the Ghadarites (Bilga, 1980). As a result, the Desh Bhagat Yadgar Memorial Hall is home to tens of thousands of books and documents relating to the revolutionary tradition. In his own words:

I have dedicated myself to this museum which has thirty-five other freedom fighters as its members. It traces the life of each and every Ghadari along with their photographs. We have collected them from their villages, relatives, and friends in India and abroad. And all this to tell the world that Englishmen didn't leave India because a handful of Indians threw salt into their eyes. They left because we sent them packing.⁹

From the 1970s onwards Bilga toured Britain raising funds for the library. In the early 1990s, the Ghadari *mela*, a five-day festival, was inaugurated in which the lives and the achievements of the rebels are celebrated.¹⁰ At the 100th anniversary celebrations in 2014, a large contingent of IWA activists and post-holders from Birmingham attended the event, demonstrating ongoing transnational solidarity.

Poetic consciousness and political articulation

The role of a newspaper, however, is not limited solely to the dissemination of ideas, to political education, and to the enlistment of political allies. A newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, it is also a collective organiser.

*(V.I. Lenin, 1901)*¹¹

In line with so much left wing activity in the early part of the twentieth century, an "organ" for the party was considered essential and so the Ghadar's weekly paper, under their eponym, was seen as integral to their praxis. As stated in its inaugural issue of 1 November 1913: "[this newspaper] conveys the message of rebellion to the nation once a week. It is brave, outspoken, unbri-dled, soft footed and given to the use of strong language. It is lightning, a storm and a flame of fire" (quoted in Ramnath, 2011, 38). Initially in Urdu and then in Punjabi (Gurmukhi), the lasting and most often commented upon element of the paper has been the poems. Indeed, these were the most popular aspects of the periodical, such that anthologies of the poems were

collected under the title *Ghadar di Goonj* (Echoes of Rebellion) and published from 1914 onwards.¹² Six volumes were published in total and they had a mass circulation throughout the diaspora. As Udham Singh's previously highlighted experiences show, they were considered seditious in their own right.

Even though the prose of the Ghadar weekly has been subject to some analysis, it is the poetry that has often attracted the most commentary. This is partly because this aspect was seen as the main tool that mobilised the majority of illiterate, migrant workers, but also, as is the case for this chapter, the ideas the poems presented carry resonance far into the twentieth century – true echoes of rebellion. There are two aspects of Ghadar thought, as represented in their poetry, that are of particular concern when looking at its influence on the British IWA. The first is the issue of secularism and the second is the mobilisation and articulation of the status of migrants.

The overwhelming consensus in academic studies of Ghadar is that they were a secular movement (Gill, 2014). This assessment is supported in their often harsh criticism of the links between clerical and colonial authority. For example, the following poem from January 1914 states:

It is better to die than live a life of serfdom,
We should never forget this phrase: China has awakened from its deep slumber, drums
of Hindustan's awakening are raging
We do not need Pandits or Kazis, for we do not want our ship to sink
The time for prayers and contemplation is past, it is time to raise the sword
The Ghadar paper is proclaiming; the time is ripe for revolt.

(January, 1914 in *Kesar*, 1995, 100–101)

Another example from the same year further elaborates:

They [collaborators] have all the good people from temples and mosques,
these black hearts have even sold Gurdwaras
They have become Rai Bahadur, Khan Bahadurs – all monkey imitators, pretending to
be our protectors while betraying the country
Save yourself from these sinners somehow, O' lions, take this opportunity to rebel together.

(September, 1914 in *Kesar*, 1995, 149)

Each of the poems makes a direct criticism of religious figures, the Pandit and the Kazi, but also of the practices of 'prayer and contemplation'. The second poem places the corruption of religion at the hands of collaborators with the British state, reflecting a distance that could be interpreted as reflecting a secular outlook (Puri, 1983). However, Parmbir Gill (2014) has questioned both readings of these poems as evidence of a secular consciousness amongst the migrant workers or as proof that the Ghadar party had an ideological bias against religion. Referring to other poems, he argues that the language of mobilisation was replete with references to Sikhism. In itself, this argument correctly notes the empirical use of religious symbols for mobilising the Punjabi masses in Ghadar poetry and more generally in its tradition. Nevertheless, a more subtle reading is required because when symbols are evoked to this end, no formal religious appellations of identity are used. In contrast, in those cases when the identities of Sikh, Hindu or Muslim are made clear, their depiction is almost entirely negative and/or these religious differences must be overcome for the sake of unity. Alternatively, when the Gurus and the Singhs

(as Khalsa warriors) are mentioned, they take the form of a call for action and an appeal outside of those formal religious identifications. For example:

The Guru established the Path for selfless service, He fought a marvellous battle
To remove tyranny from India, battles on many fronts
For this *Hind*, millions sacrificed their lives, it is we who have forgotten the cause
The Tenth Guru sacrificed his whole family, along with Nabbi and Ganni Shah for
the cause.

(January, 1914 in Kesar, 1995, 94–97)

In this sense, the evocation of a martial tradition is one that overcomes the religious divisions and does not emphasise one or enforce another.¹³ Indeed, this idea of unity or overcoming division is a central theme in many poems:

Form secret societies and cooperate with Marathas and Bengalis, be comrades with them
O' Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, show unity and cooperation, there is no time to waste
Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims and Bengalis, we are all sons of Hindustan
Let us keep religion and doctrinaires aside, we will deal them later, first is the task of war.
The world recalls and celebrates the brave, like the legend of Sham Singh Atari's sword.

(January, 1914 in Kesar, 1995, 94–97)

Religious identity is in fact a hindrance to the unity which can be brought about through righteous action, in this case waging battle against the British. Further undermining the notion of a secular foundation to the Ghadar mobilisation is the distinction made between Punjabis, Bengalis and Marathas, as these are also considered separate groups that need to be brought together in the struggle.

Perhaps the most persuasive point to this end is that the Ghadar consciousness arising out of early twentieth-century struggle is recognisable as diasporic; they made identity as process (Hall, 1996; Kalra *et al.*, 2005). The ideas expressed in the poems are not about settled notions of religion or region: the already given and bequeathed ideas of the colonial knowledge-making system. Rather, there is an aspiration for a new kind of subjectivity that is 'Hindvi,'¹⁴ which was refined by Bhagat Singh in the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association to encompass a whole range of characteristics (Sharma, 2009). Limiting this process to either a secular, regional or religious identity to some extent misses the more profound aspect of the processes that the Ghadar poetry articulates. The transformational process from slavery to freedom, from colonised to independence, has been articulated throughout the twentieth century, most notably by Franz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1965), but here it is the experience of dislocation through migration that adds poignancy. The experience of racism in the USA makes the Ghadar aware of being enslaved in India.¹⁵ Indeed, this is expressed explicitly in their poetic offerings:

The whites don't like blacks, let's show them what black hands are capable of, brothers
Why work for the white bosses, let us work for our country, brothers
Let's join as a party and go back to throw off the chains of slavery
What have we gained from these years of being pushed around in a foreign country?

(March, 1915, Kesar, 1995, 199)

These straightforward poetic utterings bring out two themes that will be repeated in the writings of the IWA gatherings in the UK that begin in the late 1950s.

The first is being treated badly by white bosses and being called and using the epithet "black." Anant Ram, one of the members of the pre-Second World War IWA, succinctly articulates his own experience in England, echoing the Ghadars 5,000 miles from California and more than half a century on: "A few went back permanently. They felt the kind of work they did here, was below their dignity. Also we were all called 'Blackie, Blackie' and some people resented that" (Ram & Tatla, 1993, 71). Although the use of the term black to represent the collective experiences of racism faced by post-Second World War immigrants from the former colonies has fallen out of use in much contemporary writing on Britain, it has a legacy that precedes mass migration and a purchase that goes beyond much recent revisionism.¹⁶ As a way of articulating the experiences of working class migrants regardless of their ethnic origins, the political signifier black brought together various colonised peoples in a range of formations and movements that stretched from Guyana to Fiji via South Africa and the Americas.¹⁷ It was the experience of a common class and racial situation that allowed for identity to be articulated in this way. As the social and economic structures in the UK changed through deindustrialisation in the 1980s and neoliberalism in the 2000s, the basis of a unified black anti-racist struggle diminished.¹⁸

Diasporic histories became replete with the voices of those who appear prominently in the archive of the dominant. Thus the excellent scholarly work on South Asians in Britain is most evocative and detailed when it addresses male figures such as Shapurji Saklatvala or Duleep Singh – those who were established enough to appear in official history. It is only through access to non-English sources and attention to literary forms, such as poetry, that alternative marginalised narratives of the past can be reclaimed. Even here attention has to be made to those voices that are absent, such as those of women migrants and activists. That the demonstration for Rohith Vemula that opens this chapter was predominantly male contrasts sharply with the actual mobilisations on Indian campuses, in relation to the same issue, where gender has begun to be addressed by the Indian left. A parallel movement took place in the 1980s in the UK, where groups such as Southall Black Sisters and the Organisation of Women of African and Asian descent emerged, asserting the necessity of gender as a central aspect of left, anti-racist struggle.

IWA poetry

Overlapping personnel and hagiographies are two elements of the continuities between the Ghadar party and the IWA; but there was also a further link through the use of poetry and the affective power it had for expression and mobilisation. An interview with Anant Ram, one of the committee members of the pre-war Indian Workers' party, brings out these elements succinctly:

To help myself, I wrote down a poem in my own words while at work. The first two lines of this poem, I remember to this day: . . .

. . . (How long before our appeals for mercy be accepted

When would the shackles of slavery be broken?)

At this meeting, we also resolved to bring out a newspaper. This involved much work. We called the newspaper, *Azad Hind*, much on the pattern of a paper produced by the [Ghadar] movement. My poem was also published in this paper.

(Ram & Tatla, 1993, 72)

Anant Ram's experiences almost directly correspond to those of workers in California at the turn of the nineteenth century. The necessity of a journal to express political ideas and the use of poetry would link this colonial workers' organisation to the post-war IWAs that formed as a result of mass migration from Punjab.

The early IWA went into decline in the post-war period, largely due to the euphoria of independence and the sojourner nature of the committee members and resultant factionalisation (Visram, 2002). Though there was no direct contact in terms of personnel, the leaders of the new IWA that began to form in the 1960s were certainly aware of the political legacy and history of organising in the UK (as illustrated by the banner in the demonstration that opens this chapter). The new IWA was led by Jagmohan Joshi, a charismatic speaker and a poet of some repute, up to his untimely death in 1979.¹⁹ As Gill correctly notes: "The IWAs continued the tradition of revolutionary poetry and folk songs in the diasporic, post-colonial setting. Now it would be used to resist racism, exploitation by British factory owners and help maintain a sense of self in an alien environment" (Gill, 2011, 251). This poetry found its most prominent outlet in the organisation's publishing activities. *Mazdoor* was a magazine launched in the early 1960s, *Lok Shakti* came out from 1980 to 1987, and *Lalkar* began in 1967 and survives to this day (though now entirely in English) (Tatla & Singh, 1989). Though there were multiple (named) poets who contributed to these publications, not all of whom were party members or necessarily even communists, the poetry selection's overall ideology resonates with that of the Ghadars in its internationalism and focus on racism.

Once formal colonialism was over, global inequality and imperialism were issues at the fore of the IWA's poetic output along with issues that impacted immigrant workers. The following example from Ajmer Coventry (an appellation that in some senses sums up the roles that the IWA took in Britain) comes from the ad hoc literary publication *Inglaind vasda Punjab* (Punjab Living in England, 1985).²⁰ In this magazine, Ajmer writes in an article titled "The difficulties and issues of a Punjabi writer" that his incumbent duty is to express social ills and problems. At first he is fairly critical of the writer community as he states: "When we enter into British society, we quickly go from being a teacher, professor, superintendent, policeman, accountant, army man, government official or inspector to 'Johnny, Andy, blackie, Wog, Paki or bastard'" (1985, 66). Following this declassing and rejection by British society, the writer looks back to the homeland as solace:

The land is strange, the people stranger
Burdened foreigner, I am
Friends, family, miles away
Sat far from home, I am.

(*A Song, Ajmer Coventry, 1985, 66*)

However, this melancholy is not sufficient for Ajmer, who beckons writers in his critical essay to pay attention to the condition of the working class in Britain, rather than solely focusing on the pain of migration.

To some extent the call for paying attention to class is not fully taken up, even by other writers from within the IWA where racism remains a prominent theme. The following poem comes from a collection edited by Niranjana Singh Noor, who was probably one of the key intellectuals of the IWA in the 1980s and certainly the most engaged with literature and poetry.²¹ This extract from Mohinder Gill's poem "Colour" is from a collection edited and translated by Noor:

Too much colour is suffocating the pure white of France,
Crippling Germany, making Britain sick.
Too much colour is threatening Europe's

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pure white Christianity.
(A little known fact – Jews were pure white and European!)
...
I wish these neo-colourists would understand
It's not the colour of a person's skin
That really hurts them
It's the burden of imperialism
that is becoming too much for them.

(Gill in Noor, 1997, 13)

Noor published several anthologies of poetry, with perhaps the best known being *Mukti* (Liberation). His own poems further echo the Ghadar themes, with a shared attitude towards religion being most notable. The following poem is an extract from a live recording on YouTube in which he makes a long critique of religion and ends here:

The idols that you worship
I am the mother of their souls
Nanak, Jesus and in Buddha's name
give me bread, give me bread
I am hungry from birth, my girlfriends
Give me bread, give me bread.²²

Here the female voice, traditional in Sufi, bhakti and Sikh poetry from the medieval period, is used not in supplication to the (male) prophet/God, but rather as a point of asserting a material need. Even the title of Noor's best-known poem, "*Mukti*", is derived from liberation from the cycle of birth and death, materialised in a Marxist reading as liberation:

What is liberation? What is liberation?
To escape from the web of the mind,
Then like the free wind
Breaking the bounds of the nation
Living life like immortal lovers.

(Noor, 1989, 21)

Writers such as Noor and Ajmer exceeded the party format in terms of their literary output. Indeed, many of their writings and public appearances were under the auspices of writers' associations, in which liberals and leftists would come together with a common interest in the Punjabi language. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the organisational strength and to some extent the poetic tradition of the IWAs declined.

Conclusion

You cannot deny the truth that the migrant lives in constant turmoil and the 'one is always divided into two'. This is split. But our conditions are made worse, because in this country where we have settled [the UK], even though we are part of the lowest class, that has not changed our way of thinking. We always look back to our past to resolve the pain of our present, which means we do not engage in dialectical thinking and literature, if not dialectical, is nothing.

(Ajmer Coventry, 1985, 66)

The above somewhat orthodox Marxist position on the state of Punjabi literature in Britain in the 1980s is important because it illustrates how the experience of immigration and racism does not necessarily lead to the shift in consciousness that is so central to the Ghadar experience. Arguably, by the 1980s, Indian workers had become settled into British society and it was nostalgia that was central to the writers' articulations and experiences. Ajmer's comments were disparaging but at the same time reflect the fact that Punjabis were actually just as much British as they were migrants by this stage. Indeed, the fundamental difference between the Ghadars and the IWA is that one left to liberate the homeland, while the other made Britain their home and fought for their rights in the new context. To some extent the Ghadars' experiences in the USA, while crucial to the development of a new consciousness, were subsumed by the independence struggle. Perhaps it is for this reason that more has been written on the Ghadar party and more effort has gone into collecting the history of that organisation than has been the case for the IWA. This chapter offers a schema for understanding the links between these two organisations in terms of overlapping personnel, ideologies and forms of popular mobilisation and opens up the scope for further comparative scholarship.

Notes

- 1 From Ramnath (2011, 235) and Singh and Johul (2002), original document, India Office record, IOR/LPJ/12/500.
- 2 Rohith Vemula was a doctoral student at Hyderabad University, where his activities in anti-caste politics led to his suspension and withdrawal of financial support. In protest, he committed suicide on 17 January 2016, which led to widespread protests throughout India.
- 3 This popular eulogy is associated with Kartar Singh Sarabha, one of the first group of Ghadarites to be executed by the British colonial authorities in 1915. From Isemonger and Slattery (1919, xv).
- 4 This is a contested colour scheme: for some the orange represents self-sacrifice, green the earth, and red the colour of revolution, with the crossed swords being knowledge and valour.
- 5 See <http://frankbrazil.org/>.
- 6 Six bullets were fired in total and Lord Zetland, Secretary of State for India, was hit twice although he was only slightly injured, as were Lord Lamington and Sir Louis Dane.
- 7 This is a law in the UK which restricts access to government documents for reasons of national security. Thus the documents on Udham Singh were not available until 1990.
- 8 The *Jaito Morcha* was a social movement of Sikhs in the 1920s that aimed to take control of historic Gurdwaras from the hands of *mahants* (caretakers) who were de facto being supported by the colonial state (mostly in terms of property rights).
- 9 From an interview carried out by Teena Bhrua, available on www.harmonyindia.org/hportal/Virtual-PageView.jsp?page_id=1118&index1=0 (accessed 12 January 2016).
- 10 Bilga wrote for newspapers and magazines, and also wrote a number of books, such as *Socialism Kya Hai?* (What is Socialism?), *Mera Vatan* (My Country), *Meree Samajh*, *Meree Soch* (My Understanding, My Thinking) and *Baba Gurmukhsingh Kee Jeevanee* (Biography of Baba Gurumukh Singh).
- 11 V.I. Lenin 'Where to Begin' (1901), *Lenin Collected Works*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961, Moscow, Volume 5, pp. 13–24.
- 12 These are all gathered in one volume in Punjabi, Kesar (1995).
- 13 Gill (2013) is aware of these limitations but is caught up in a distinction between the religious and the secular which is not tenable when looking at Punjabi cultural output in the early part of the twentieth century. (See Kalra 2015 for a more detailed exposition of this argument.)
- 14 Thanks to Maqsood Saqib for this insight in his presentation at the Commemorating Ghadar Conference at LUMS, Lahore, December 2014.
- 15 DuBois himself is aware of the Afro-Asian connection as best articulated in his novel *The Dark Princess*. See Elam (2015) for an insightful discussion.
- 16 In particular, the strain of Afrocentrism represented by Kehinde (2016).
- 17 See Prashad (2002).

- 18 It can be argued that the appellation 'Muslim' also works in a similar manner in the contemporary UK context, where structural marginality and racism overcome the diversity of ethnic, sectarian and theological positions which are contained by the identification.
- 19 In an almost bizarre repetition of the nature of the Ghadar leadership, like Har Dayal, Joshi was a Hindu Punjabi who wrote his poetry in Urdu and led a group of predominantly rural Punjabis. Joshi's most famous poem *Dilli door nay* (Delhi is not far), has been translated into English and formed the basis for a theatre production.
- 20 This magazine is in Punjabi and all the translations are by the author.
- 21 Noor was one of the early members of the IWA and a teacher in Wolverhampton. He parted company with them after the storming of the Harimandir (Golden Temple) in 1984 by the Indian army as he disagreed with the perspective taken by the IWA (GB). He set up the Sikh Workers' Association but this was short lived. On the multiple splits and configurations of the various IWAs since the 1960s, see Josephides (1991)
- 22 www.youtube.com/watch?v=lCTBYEJA_qI (accessed 1 March 2016).

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