



# REVOLUTIONARY LEADERSHIP AND IDEOLOGICAL PLURALISM IN THE GADAR MOVEMENT (1913-1915):

A STUDY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO BHAI PARMANAND

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**Abstract:** The Gadar Movement (1913-1915) was one of the most important anti-colonial movements in Indian history. It was organized among Indian workers on the Pacific Coast of North America. This paper studies the leaders of the Gadar Movement in a comparative and analytical way. It examines figures such as Sohan Singh Bhakna, Baba Jawala Singh, Lala Hardayal, Kartar Singh Sarabha, Sant Baba Wasakha Singh Dadehar, Hafiz Abdullah, Karim Bux, Nawab Khan, and Bhai Parmanand. The central argument is simple: the movement's internal ideological diversity was not a weakness. It was its greatest political and organizational strength. Each type of leader could reach a different section of the Indian diaspora. The paper uses a typological framework. Five types of revolutionary leadership are identified: the philosopher-revolutionary, the patriarchal organizer, the martyr, the spiritual revolutionary, and the cultural nationalist intellectual. Bhai Parmanand receives special attention. He combined the Arya Samaj tradition of Hindu cultural reform with revolutionary anti-colonial politics. This placed him at the centre of the movement's deepest internal tensions. The paper examines what these tensions meant for the long-term trajectory of Indian nationalism.

**Index Terms:** Gadar Movement, Bhai Parmanand, Indian nationalism, anti-colonialism, revolutionary leadership, Punjabi diaspora, Lahore Conspiracy Case, Arya Samaj, Hindu-Muslim-Sikh unity, Lala Hardayal, Kartar Singh Sarabha, Sohan Singh Bhakna.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Gadar Movement was formally founded in Astoria, Oregon in 1913. It is one of the most remarkable chapters in the history of global anti-colonial politics. The movement did not begin in Calcutta or Bombay. It did not begin in the halls of the Indian National Congress. It began in the lumber mills of Oregon. It began on the fruit farms of California. It began in the construction camps of British Columbia. Punjabi workers started this movement. They had crossed the Pacific Ocean in search of better lives. Instead, they found racial discrimination and political exclusion. That experience turned many of them into committed revolutionaries.<sup>1</sup>

The movement had a clear and bold goal. It planned to start an armed uprising in India. It wanted to convince Indian soldiers in the British Indian Army to revolt. This uprising was timed to coincide with the First World War. The founders believed that Britain would be too busy fighting in Europe to suppress a revolution in India. They thought the time had come to act. They acted on that belief with remarkable courage and at great personal cost.

<sup>1</sup>H.K. Puri, *Gadar Movement: Ideology, Organisation and Strategy* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University Press, 1983), pp. 1-15; G.S. Deol, *The Role of Gadar Party in the National Movement* (Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1969), pp. 1-12; M. Rammath, *Haj to Utopia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), pp. 1-25; S.S. Josh, *Hindustan Gadar Party: A Short History*, 2 vols. (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1977-78), vol. 1, pp. 1-20.

Scholarship on the Gadar Movement has grown steadily. But two problems still limit how scholars understand it. The first problem is that scholars often treat the movement's leaders as heroes or symbols. They celebrate the martyrs without studying them as complex human beings with specific backgrounds, ideas, and contradictions. The second problem is that most scholarship focuses too much on the organizational and military side of the movement. It ignores the movement's rich ideological and cultural dimensions. Both approaches give an incomplete picture. They miss what made the Gadar Movement so remarkable.

This paper takes a different approach. It compares the Gadar Movement's principal leaders. It uses a typological framework to identify five distinct modes of revolutionary leadership. The paper shows that each type of leader contributed something different and valuable. Together, these different types made the Gadar Movement stronger than any single type of leader could have made it alone. The figure of Bhai Parmanand serves as a key analytical reference point throughout. His position at the intersection of Hindu cultural nationalism and anti-colonial revolution brings the movement's deepest tensions into focus.

The paper is organized into six sections. Section II explains the structural conditions that made the movement possible. Section III develops the typology of leadership and examines each type in detail. Section IV analyzes Bhai Parmanand's specific position within the movement. Section V draws broader historical conclusions about the Gadar Movement's significance. Section VI is the conclusion.

## II. THE CONDITIONS THAT MADE THE MOVEMENT POSSIBLE

To understand the Gadar Movement, one must first understand the conditions that produced it. Punjabi workers did not go to North America purely by choice. They were driven out of Punjab by economic pressure. The British colonial land revenue system created severe hardship for farming families. The British demanded fixed money payments from farmers. But farmers' incomes depended on the harvest. When harvests were poor, farmers could not pay. Many fell into debt. Many families eventually lost their land. The commercialization of agriculture in Punjab also redirected production from subsistence crops toward export commodities. This made farming families vulnerable to international market fluctuations they could not control.<sup>2</sup>

The opening of trans-Pacific shipping routes made migration physically possible. Employers in North America actively recruited Indian workers for lumber mills, orchards, and railway construction. By the first decade of the twentieth century, a large Punjabi diaspora had settled across the Pacific Coast. These communities were concentrated in British Columbia, California, Oregon, and Washington.<sup>3</sup>

The conditions that greeted these workers were harsh. The Alien Land Laws passed in American western states after 1913 prevented Asian immigrants from owning or long-term leasing land. Naturalization rules restricted citizenship to 'free white persons'. This barred even long-settled Indian residents from becoming citizens. Indian workers faced wage discrimination. They were paid less than white workers for the same work. They faced social exclusion and violence from nativist groups. An Indian worker in California experienced double subordination. He was exploited economically as a labourer. He was excluded politically as a colonial subject of empire.<sup>4</sup>

A powerful political insight emerged from these experiences. This insight became the founding premise of the Gadar Movement. Racial discrimination in North America and colonial rule in India were not two separate problems. They were two expressions of the same imperial system. The British Empire governed India without the consent of its people. The same empire, through its racial hierarchy, ensured that Indians were treated as inferiors everywhere within its sphere. This insight was equally available to a Punjabi farmer and to an Oxford-educated intellectual. Both understood that the problem was the empire itself. The only solution was to end it.<sup>5</sup>

This shared insight made cross-class and cross-communal solidarity possible. In the lumber mills and orchards of the Pacific Coast, the Jat Sikh farmer and the Brahmin intellectual occupied very similar social positions. Racial contempt did not distinguish between Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims. All Indians

<sup>2</sup>I. Ali, *The Punjab Under Imperialism, 1885-1947* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 23-60; Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India: 1885-1947* (New Delhi: Macmillan, 1983), pp. 28-45; Dadabhai Naoroji, *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* (London: Swan Sonnenschein and Co., 1901), pp. 1-30; Romesh Chunder Dutt, *The Economic History of India Under Early British Rule* (London: Kegan Paul, 1902), pp. 1-30.

<sup>3</sup>J.M. Jensen, *Passage from India: Asian Indian Immigrants in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 30-60; H.J.M. Johnston, *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 5-20; D.S. Tatla, *Gadar Movement: A Guide to Sources* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University Press, 2003), pp. 12-20; S. Sohi, *Echoes of Mutiny* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 20-45.

<sup>4</sup>J.M. Jensen, *Passage from India*, pp. 80-120; H.J.M. Johnston, *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru*, pp. 5-30; S. Sohi, *Echoes of Mutiny*, pp. 30-60; D.S. Tatla, *Gadar Movement: A Guide to Sources*, pp. 15-25.

<sup>5</sup>H.K. Puri, *Gadar Movement*, pp. 33-55; G.S. Deol, *The Role of Gadar Party*, pp. 28-45; M. Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*, pp. 40-65; S.S. Josh, *Hindustan Gadar Party*, vol. 1, pp. 45-70; D.S. Tatla, *Gadar Movement: A Guide to Sources*, pp. 22-40.

were equally excluded and equally humiliated. This shared experience created a strong emotional foundation for collective action.<sup>6</sup>

The Komagata Maru incident of 1914 crystallized these feelings with particular force. Gurdit Singh chartered a Japanese steamship to carry 376 Indian passengers from Hong Kong to Vancouver. His intention was to challenge the Continuous Journey Regulation, which effectively barred Indians from entering Canada. The Canadian government refused to let the passengers disembark. The ship sat in Vancouver harbour for two months. The passengers endured terrible conditions. The ship was then forced to return to India. When it arrived at Budge Budge near Calcutta, British authorities tried to arrest Gurdit Singh. Twenty passengers were killed in the confrontation that followed. The Komagata Maru incident became a powerful symbol of colonial humiliation. It strengthened the Gadar Party's argument that only revolution could bring dignity and justice.<sup>7</sup>

### III. A TYPOLOGY OF REVOLUTIONARY LEADERSHIP IN THE GADAR MOVEMENT

The Gadar Movement's leadership was remarkably diverse. It brought together farmers and professors, Sikh saints and Muslim clerics, young students and experienced organizers, poets and soldiers. This diversity can be understood through a typological framework. The framework identifies five principal modes of revolutionary leadership: (1) the philosopher-revolutionary, (2) the patriarchal organizer, (3) the martyr, (4) the spiritual revolutionary, and (5) the cultural nationalist intellectual. These types are not rigid categories. Individual leaders sometimes combined features of more than one. But they identify clear patterns of formation, contribution, and authority that structured the movement's internal division of labour.<sup>8</sup>

#### A. The Philosopher-Revolutionary: Lala Hardayal

Lala Hardayal (1884-1939) is the clearest example of the philosopher-revolutionary type. This type of leader contributes mainly through ideas. His authority comes from the power of his thinking. Hardayal was born in Delhi. He came from an educated Kayastha family. His academic abilities were exceptional. He won a government scholarship to University College, Oxford, around 1905. In 1907, he made the most important decision of his life. He gave up his Oxford scholarship. By doing so, he publicly rejected the colonial bargain. This bargain offered promising Indian students a good education in exchange for loyal service to the British Empire.<sup>9</sup>

At Oxford, Hardayal read widely. He studied classical Sanskrit philosophy. He studied European anarchism, especially Bakunin and Kropotkin. He read the secular humanism of Bertrand Russell and the republican nationalism of Mazzini and Garibaldi. From all this reading, he developed an original intellectual framework. But books alone did not radicalize him. Being a brilliant Indian student at the heart of the British Empire was itself a radicalizing experience. He was welcomed as an intellectual equal in the lecture hall. But outside it, he was treated as a colonial subject. That contradiction could not be ignored by a mind like his.<sup>10</sup>

Hardayal arrived in San Francisco in 1911. He became the intellectual centre of the emerging revolutionary community. His most important practical contribution was founding and editing the Gadar newspaper. This paper launched in November 1913. It was published in Urdu, Punjabi, Hindi, and other Indian languages. This multilingual approach was deliberate. It reflected the movement's commitment to reaching the widest possible audience. Under his editorial direction, the paper combined sharp political analysis with revolutionary poetry, historical education, and direct calls to action. It was both intellectually serious and emotionally compelling. Hardayal also founded the Bakunin Institute in California, an attempt to create a sustained programme of revolutionary education for party cadres.<sup>11</sup>

In March 1914, the American government arrested Hardayal on charges of anarchist activity, under pressure from Britain. He jumped bail and fled to Europe. His presence in Berlin at the start of the First

<sup>6</sup>H.J.M. Johnston, *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru*, pp. 45-120; J.M. Jensen, *Passage from India*, pp. 100-130; S. Sohi, *Echoes of Mutiny*, pp. 60-90; H.K. Puri, *Gadar Movement*, pp. 33-50; Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2016), pp. 162-175.

<sup>7</sup>H.J.M. Johnston, *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru*, pp. 70-130; H.K. Puri, *Gadar Movement*, pp. 58-72; G.S. Deol, *The Role of Gadar Party*, pp. 55-75; M. Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*, pp. 62-80.

<sup>8</sup>H.K. Puri, *Gadar Movement*, pp. 55-80; G.S. Deol, *The Role of Gadar Party*, pp. 28-50; S.S. Josh, *Hindustan Gadar Party*, vol. 1, pp. 35-65; M. Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*, pp. 40-68; D.S. Tatla, *Gadar Movement: A Guide to Sources*, pp. 22-42.

<sup>9</sup>E.C. Brown, *Har Dayal: Hindu Revolutionary and Rationalist* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1975), pp. 1-30; H.K. Puri, *Gadar Movement*, pp. 60-75; G.S. Deol, *The Role of Gadar Party*, pp. 48-62; A.C. Bose, *Indian Revolutionaries Abroad, 1905-1922* (Patna: Bharati Bhawan, 1971), pp. 55-80.

<sup>10</sup>E.C. Brown, *Har Dayal*, pp. 45-80; H.K. Puri, *Gadar Movement*, pp. 62-75; A.C. Bose, *Indian Revolutionaries Abroad*, pp. 60-85; H. Fischer-Tine, *Shyamji Krishnavarma: Sanskrit, Sociology and Anti-Imperialism* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2014), pp. 120-145.

<sup>11</sup>E.C. Brown, *Har Dayal*, pp. 110-160; H.K. Puri, *Gadar Movement*, pp. 100-125; G.S. Deol, *The Role of Gadar Party*, pp. 60-80; Khushwant Singh and Satindra Singh, *Gadar 1915: India's First Armed Revolution* (New Delhi: R&K Publishing House, 1966), pp. 45-65.

World War drew him into the Hindu-German Conspiracy. This was an effort to get German military and financial support for an armed uprising in India. The conspiracy ultimately failed. British intelligence had penetrated the revolutionary networks. The logistical challenges of coordinating operations across vast distances proved too great. Hardayal died in Philadelphia in 1939, in exile, eight years before the independence he had devoted the best years of his life to achieving.<sup>12</sup>

### **B. The Patriarchal Organizer: Sohan Singh Bhakna and Baba Jawala Singh**

If Hardayal gave the Gadar Movement its intellectual identity, Sohan Singh Bhakna (1870-1968) gave it its organizational backbone. Bhakna was born in the village of Bhakna, Amritsar district. He came from a Jat Sikh family. He had no formal university education. But he had natural organizational ability. He had an instinctive sense of fairness. He had the capacity to build trust among dispersed working communities. He had worked in the lumber mills of Oregon. He knew the world of the Punjabi working-class immigrant from the inside. His peers elected him the first President of the Pacific Coast Hindustan Association at the founding meeting in Astoria in 1913. This was a recognition of his character and standing among ordinary workers.<sup>13</sup>

What most defined Bhakna as a leader was his democratic character. He refused to build a personal cult. He did not claim authority through social rank or education. He lived exactly as the workers he organized lived. His moral authority came from the visible consistency between what he said and what he did. Building a revolutionary organization requires slow and unglamorous work. It requires holding meetings, collecting funds, distributing literature, maintaining communication across distances, keeping members motivated, and managing internal tensions. None of this is as exciting as writing manifestos or giving public lectures. But without it, no revolutionary organization can survive. Bhakna provided this essential foundation.

When the First World War began in August 1914, the Gadar leadership voted to send members back to India to begin the planned uprising. Bhakna returned. He was arrested, tried in the First Lahore Conspiracy Case, and sentenced to transportation for life. This sent him to the Cellular Jail in the Andaman Islands, known as the Kala Pani. The Cellular Jail was the most feared prison in the British Empire. It was designed to destroy political prisoners. Each prisoner was kept in a separate cell. The forced labour was brutal. The food was inadequate. Physical punishment was frequent. Psychological cruelty was systematic. Bhakna endured sixteen years in these conditions. He was released in 1930. He joined the Communist Party of India. He died in 1968 at approximately ninety-eight years of age. His life was one of extraordinary and unbroken commitment to the cause of the poor and the oppressed.<sup>14</sup>

Baba Jawala Singh illustrates a different dimension of the patriarchal organizer type. He was a founding member of the Gadar Party and an effective organizer among the California farming communities. His most remarkable contribution was financial. He donated a substantial part of his life savings from years of agricultural labour in California to the party's funds. This was a statement of total commitment. It inspired other workers to give as well. His vision of independent India was inseparable from his vision of agrarian justice: land to those who work it, and an end to debt bondage for farming families.

### **C. The Martyr: Kartar Singh Sarabha**

Kartar Singh Sarabha (1896-1915) is the most celebrated figure in the entire history of the Gadar Movement. He was hanged at Lahore Central Jail on 16 November 1915. He was nineteen years old. The martyr type does not contribute primarily through organizational work or intellectual writing. The martyr contributes through the example of his death. A martyr's willingness to sacrifice everything demonstrates the depth of a cause more powerfully than any speech or pamphlet. Sarabha was born in Sarabha village, Ludhiana district. He went to the University of California, Berkeley, in 1912. At Berkeley, he encountered Lala Hardayal. This meeting was one of the most consequential in the Gadar Movement's history.<sup>15</sup>

Sarabha was only seventeen when the Gadar Party was founded in 1913. But he became one of its most active members almost immediately. He worked on the production and distribution of the Gadar newspaper. He wrote revolutionary poetry in Punjabi. This poetry became the most celebrated writing in

<sup>12</sup>D. Dignan, *The Indian Revolutionary Problem in British Diplomacy, 1914-1919* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1983), pp. 35-75; A.C. Bose, *Indian Revolutionaries Abroad*, pp. 130-160; H. Fischer-Tine, Shyamji Krishnavarma, pp. 120-148; L.P. Mathur, *Indian Revolutionary Movement in the United States of America* (New Delhi: S. Chand and Co., 1970), pp. 100-130.

<sup>13</sup>S.S. Josh, *Sohan Singh Bhakna: Life of the Gadarite* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1970), pp. 35-70; H.K. Puri, *Gadar Movement*, pp. 85-100; G.S. Deol, *The Role of Gadar Party*, pp. 45-62; M. Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*, pp. 80-110.

<sup>14</sup>Ujjwal Kumar Singh, *Political Prisoners in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 45-80; Bhai Parmanand, *The Story of My Life*, trans. B.L. Bhagat (Delhi: S. Chand, 1982), pp. 100-145; H.K. Puri, *Gadar Movement*, pp. 180-200; G.C. Ismonger and J. Slattery, *An Account of the Gadar Conspiracy* (Lahore: Superintendent Government Printing, 1919; reprint, Archana Prakashan), pp. 45-80.

<sup>15</sup>Khushwant Singh and Satindra Singh, *Gadar 1915*, pp. 30-80; H.K. Puri, *Gadar Movement*, pp. 165-185; G.S. Deol, *The Role of Gadar Party*, pp. 80-100; G.C. Ismonger and J. Slattery, *An Account of the Gadar Conspiracy*, pp. 80-110.

the movement's literary output. It captured both the pain of colonial subjugation and the fierce joy of resistance in simple, direct, and emotionally powerful language.

Sarabha returned to Punjab in September 1914. He worked hard to build organizational networks for the planned uprising. He made contact with sympathetic soldiers in the British Indian Army. He distributed revolutionary materials. He organized local cells of activists. British intelligence had penetrated the movement. Plans were betrayed by informers. Sarabha was captured before the uprising could begin. At his trial, he declared openly that he was proud to have worked for India's independence. He met his death without self-pity or regret.<sup>16</sup>

The effect of his martyrdom on the subsequent revolutionary tradition was profound and lasting. Bhagat Singh, who became the most celebrated revolutionary martyr of the next generation, carried a photograph of Sarabha throughout his revolutionary career. He explicitly named Sarabha as his personal hero and measured his own commitment against Sarabha's example. The connection between these two young Punjabi revolutionaries became one of the most powerful symbolic threads in the history of Indian revolutionary nationalism.<sup>17</sup>

#### **D. The Spiritual Revolutionary: Sant Baba Wasakha Singh Dadehar**

Sant Baba Wasakha Singh Dadehar represents a dimension of the Gadar Movement's leadership that is easy to overlook. He combined deep religious authority within his community with revolutionary political commitment. He was born in Dadehar village, Punjab. He had earned the title 'Sant' through years of devotional practice and community service. Sikh theology teaches that all human beings are equal before God. Caste and racial hierarchy are human inventions that contradict divine intention. The obligation to resist tyranny is a spiritual duty. For Wasakha Singh, British colonial rule was a form of cosmic injustice. Fighting against it was a religious obligation. His involvement in the Gadar Movement was a direct expression of his spiritual life, not a departure from it. His practical value to the movement was substantial. He could reach sections of the Punjabi Sikh diaspora that secular political arguments could not effectively reach.<sup>18</sup>

Wasakha Singh's sermons drew freely on the Guru Granth Sahib, on the history of Sikh martyrdom, and on the tradition of Sikh military resistance to tyranny. He wove these into a narrative in which the Gadar Movement appeared as the latest chapter in a long and sacred history of righteous resistance. The gurdwara network across the Punjabi diaspora was central to the movement's organizational infrastructure. His standing within this network gave the movement an organizational reach it could not otherwise have achieved.<sup>19</sup>

#### **E. Muslim Leadership and Communal Unity: Hafiz Abdullah, Karim Bux, and Nawab Khan**

One of the most historically significant features of the Gadar Movement was its genuine, operational commitment to Hindu-Muslim-Sikh unity. The movement's social base was overwhelmingly Punjabi Sikh. But it actively included Muslim leaders at the organizational level. This was a deliberate political and organizational choice. Hafiz Abdullah was a man of recognized standing in his Muslim community. His title indicated that he had memorized the entire Quran. Within the Gadar Movement, he served two functions. He was an active revolutionary participant. He was also a living symbol of communal solidarity.<sup>20</sup>

Karim Bux brought the perspective of the working-class Muslim immigrant. His politics were rooted in the concrete experience of double marginalization as a colonial subject and as a member of the working poor. Nawab Khan's contribution was primarily agrarian. His vision of independence was inseparable from land reform and the abolition of debt bondage. Together, these three Muslim leaders extended the movement's organizational reach into communities that its predominantly Sikh leadership could not have mobilized as effectively. The significance of this cross-communal achievement can hardly be overstated.

<sup>16</sup>G.C. Ismonger and J. Slattery, *An Account of the Gadar Conspiracy*, pp. 80-115; M.S. Gill, *Trials that Changed History: From Socrates to Saddam Hussein* (New Delhi: UBS Publishers, 2007), pp. 145-175; P. Mohan, *An Imaginary Rebellion and How It Was Suppressed* (Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette Press, 1920), pp. 1-25; *Proceedings of the Lahore Conspiracy Cases*, National Archives of India, Home Department (Political), files 260-290 of 1915.

<sup>17</sup>Khushwant Singh and Satindra Singh, *Gadar 1915*, pp. 100-130; Bhai Parmanand, *The Story of My Life*, pp. 1-25; H.K. Puri, *Gadar Movement*, pp. 195-215; H.K. Puri, *Reflections on Gadar Movement* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 2013), pp. 55-75.

<sup>18</sup>K.W. Jones, *Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in 19th-Century Punjab* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 28-80; K.C. Yadav, *Arya Samaj and the Freedom Movement*, Vol. 1: 1875-1918 (New Delhi: Manohar, 1988), pp. 88-115; Lala Lajpat Rai, *The Arya Samaj* (Lahore: 1915; reprint, New Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan, 2017), pp. 1-30; Swami Dayananda Saraswati, *Satyarth Prakash* (Lahore: Virjanand Press, 1875; reprint, New Delhi: Sarvadeshik Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, 2002), pp. 1-30.

<sup>19</sup>H.K. Puri, *Gadar Movement*, pp. 90-105; M. Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*, pp. 95-115; K.W. Jones, *Arya Dharm*, pp. 145-165; K.C. Yadav, *Arya Samaj and the Freedom Movement*, pp. 130-150; S.S. Josh, *Hindustan Gadar Party*, vol. 1, pp. 65-80.

<sup>20</sup>H.K. Puri, *Gadar Movement*, pp. 55-75; M. Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*, pp. 95-115; G.S. Deol, *The Role of Gadar Party*, pp. 45-65; Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence*, pp. 148-170.

In the decades that followed, communal conflict would tear Indian society apart. The Gadar Movement's lived and operational commitment to Hindu-Muslim-Sikh unity stands as a powerful counter-example to the narrative of inevitable communal conflict in South Asian history.

#### IV. BHAI PARMANAND AND THE MOVEMENT'S DEEPEST TENSION

Among all the figures of the Gadar Movement, Bhai Parmanand (1876-1947) is the most analytically revealing for the purposes of this paper. He was not the movement's most prominent leader. He was not its most operationally central figure. But his position within the movement illuminates its deepest internal tensions more clearly than almost any other figure. He stands at the intersection of the movement's competing commitments: between the secular and the culturally specific; between the universalist and the communally rooted; between the revolutionary and the reformist.<sup>21</sup>

##### A. Background and Ideological Formation

Bhai Parmanand was born in 1876 in Karyala village, Rawalpindi district, Punjab. He received his education within the Arya Samaj tradition. The Arya Samaj was a reformist Hindu movement founded by Swami Dayananda Saraswati in 1875. It called for a return to Vedic principles. It rejected caste discrimination. It promoted women's education. It linked Hindu cultural renewal to national awakening. Parmanand studied at D.A.V. College in Lahore. This was an Arya Samaj institution. He later worked as a preacher and missionary for the Arya Samaj. The movement's emphasis on self-reliance, national pride, and the rejection of foreign cultural dominance were values that Parmanand absorbed deeply and carried throughout his life.<sup>22</sup>

Parmanand's travels abroad were a formative turning point. He visited South Africa in 1905. There, he met Mahatma Gandhi, who was then working as a lawyer and activist for Indian rights. He saw first-hand how Indians were treated in South Africa under a system of racial laws. This experience reinforced his conviction that colonialism was a global system of oppression. Between 1910 and 1911, he traveled to Martinique and Trinidad. He met Lala Hardayal during this period and played a role in pushing Hardayal toward a more firmly nationalist position.<sup>23</sup>

Parmanand's ideological position during his Gadar involvement can be understood as a synthesis. He combined anti-colonial revolutionary commitment with Hindu cultural nationalism. In his own understanding, this was not a contradiction. The Arya Samaj argument held that the Hindu tradition properly understood was a tradition of universal values. The Vedic heritage, stripped of later distortions, was fully compatible with social equality and communal solidarity. Caste hierarchy and communal exclusivism were corruptions, not authentic expressions of Hinduism. To revitalize Hinduism in its genuine form was therefore to recover a tradition of universal human dignity.<sup>24</sup>

##### B. Contributions to the Gadar Movement

Parmanand's contributions to the Gadar Movement operated primarily on the intellectual and cultural plane. His most important written contribution was *Tarikh-i-Hind*, meaning *The History of India*. He composed this work in Urdu around 1913. It was intended to inspire its readers with pride in India's past and with anger at its present colonial subjugation. It circulated widely among Gadarites in North America and was smuggled into India. It functioned simultaneously as nationalist history and revolutionary propaganda. He also worked as an organizer inside India in the period leading up to the planned uprising of 1915. He traveled through Punjab and the North-West Frontier Province. He met with peasants, soldiers, and local leaders. He tried to prepare the ground for revolution.<sup>25</sup>

##### C. Arrest, Trial, and Imprisonment

Parmanand was arrested in 1915. He was tried in the First Lahore Conspiracy Case. He was sentenced to death. This sentence was later commuted to transportation for life. He was sent to the Cellular Jail in the Andaman Islands. Parmanand endured imprisonment with remarkable strength. He organized a two-month hunger strike to protest against the conditions inside the jail. His autobiography, *The Story of My*

<sup>21</sup>K. Sharma, *Bhai Parmanand: A Nationalist Life* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2009), pp. 1-15; Bhai Parmanand, *The Story of My Life*, pp. 1-30; H.K. Puri, *Gadar Movement*, pp. 60-75; K.W. Jones, *Arya Dharm*, pp. 145-165; K.C. Yadav, *Arya Samaj and the Freedom Movement*, pp. 112-135.

<sup>22</sup>K.W. Jones, *Arya Dharm*, pp. 28-80; K.C. Yadav, *Arya Samaj and the Freedom Movement*, pp. 88-115; K. Sharma, *Bhai Parmanand*, pp. 15-40; Bhai Parmanand, *The Story of My Life*, pp. 1-30; Lala Lajpat Rai, *The Arya Samaj*, pp. 1-25; Swami Dayananda Saraswati, *Satyarth Prakash*, pp. 1-30.

<sup>23</sup>Bhai Parmanand, *The Story of My Life*, pp. 40-70; K. Sharma, *Bhai Parmanand*, pp. 35-60; H.K. Puri, *Gadar Movement*, pp. 65-75; A.C. Bose, *Indian Revolutionaries Abroad*, pp. 8-30; H. Fischer-Tine, *Shyamji Krishnavarma*, pp. 140-160.

<sup>24</sup>K.W. Jones, *Arya Dharm*, pp. 80-120; K.C. Yadav, *Arya Samaj and the Freedom Movement*, pp. 112-135; K. Sharma, *Bhai Parmanand*, pp. 40-65; H.K. Puri, *Gadar Movement*, pp. 60-75; Swami Dayananda Saraswati, *Satyarth Prakash*, pp. 1-30.

<sup>25</sup>Bhai Parmanand, *Tarikh-i-Hind*, c. 1913; K. Sharma, *Bhai Parmanand*, pp. 65-80; H.K. Puri, *Gadar Movement*, pp. 110-120; G.S. Deol, *The Role of Gadar Party*, pp. 60-75; K.W. Jones, *Arya Dharm*, pp. 145-165.

Life, written after his release in 1920, describes the experience of the Cellular Jail with emotional honesty and literary power.<sup>26</sup>

The experience of being condemned to death by the colonial state was deeply formative for Parmanand. It marked him in ways that shaped all subsequent dimensions of his intellectual and political life. The moral authority it gave him was real and lasting. People who knew what he had faced took his later writings and speeches seriously in a way they might not have otherwise.<sup>27</sup>

#### **D. Parmanand's Position in the Comparative Portrait**

Placing Parmanand within the comparative portrait developed in this paper reveals several distinctive features. His strongest affinities were with the movement's commitment to social reform. His Arya Samaj formation made him a genuine opponent of caste discrimination and a sincere supporter of women's education. His tensions were most visible in relation to the movement's secularism. Parmanand was genuinely committed to Hindu-Muslim-Sikh cooperation as a political necessity. But his underlying understanding of Indian nationhood was more deeply rooted in a specifically Hindu cultural identity than was true of most other major Gadar leaders. During the Gadar period, the urgency of the shared revolutionary task kept this difference from becoming an open conflict. But the difference was real and would become more consequential over time.<sup>28</sup>

The contrast between Parmanand and Sohan Singh Bhakna is instructive. Bhakna moved toward explicitly socialist politics after the Gadar period. He joined the Communist Party of India. Parmanand moved toward Hindu cultural politics. His later presidency of the Hindu Mahasabha in 1937 marked a clear divergence from the secular and inclusive nationalism of the movement's founding commitments.

#### **E. The Cultural Nationalist Intellectual as Leadership Type**

Parmanand represents what this paper's typological framework calls the cultural nationalist intellectual. This type of leader grounds his revolutionary commitment in a specific cultural and religious tradition. He understands national liberation as inseparable from the revitalization of that tradition. This type is distinguished by intellectual seriousness, deep cultural rootedness, and genuine reformist commitment. These qualities separate it from more straightforward communal politics, which simply mobilizes religious identity without critically examining it. The cultural nationalist intellectual type carries a characteristic internal tension. Its reformist impulse questions existing practices in the name of a purer original tradition. But a traditionalist conservatism tends to reassert itself when that tradition feels threatened from outside.<sup>29</sup>

### **V. THE GADAR MOVEMENT IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

The comparative analysis developed in this paper supports several conclusions of broader historical significance. The first concerns the relationship between ideological diversity and organizational strength. The conventional view is that ideological unity is necessary for organizational coherence. The Gadar Movement's experience challenges this view. Its internal diversity was not a source of weakness. It was a source of strength. The philosopher-revolutionary reached the educated. The patriarchal organizer reached the working-class farming community. The spiritual revolutionary reached the devoutly religious. The cultural nationalist intellectual reached those for whom specifically Hindu national identity was primary. The Muslim leaders demonstrated that the movement's cross-communal commitments were structural and real. The diversity was the strategy.<sup>30</sup>

The second conclusion concerns the Gadar Movement's achievement of cross-communal solidarity. The dominant narrative of Indian nationalism has too often treated communal division as natural and inevitable. The Gadar Movement's experience challenges this narrative at its foundations. Here was a revolutionary organization that built genuine cross-communal solidarity. It did not do this by minimizing religious identity. It did it by insisting that anti-colonial solidarity was more fundamental than religious

<sup>26</sup>G.C. Ismonger and J. Slattery, *An Account of the Gadar Conspiracy*, pp. 80-115; M.S. Gill, *Trials that Changed History*, pp. 145-175; Bhai Parmanand, *The Story of My Life*, pp. 80-145; *Proceedings of the Lahore Conspiracy Cases*, National Archives of India, files 260-290 of 1915.

<sup>27</sup>Bhai Parmanand, *The Story of My Life*, pp. 100-145; Ujjwal Kumar Singh, *Political Prisoners in India*, pp. 45-80; K. Sharma, *Bhai Parmanand*, pp. 80-125; H.K. Puri, *Gadar Movement*, pp. 180-200.

<sup>28</sup>K. Sharma, *Bhai Parmanand*, pp. 1-15; H.K. Puri, *Gadar Movement*, pp. 55-75; K.W. Jones, *Arya Dharm*, pp. 145-165; Bhai Parmanand, *The Story of My Life*, pp. 1-30.

<sup>29</sup>K.W. Jones, *Arya Dharm*, pp. 145-175; K.C. Yadav, *Arya Samaj and the Freedom Movement*, pp. 112-155; K. Sharma, *Bhai Parmanand*, pp. 1-15; Swami Dayananda Saraswati, *Satyarth Prakash*, pp. 1-30.

<sup>30</sup>H.K. Puri, *Gadar Movement*, pp. 55-80; M. Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*, pp. 40-75; G.S. Deol, *The Role of Gadar Party*, pp. 28-52; S.S. Josh, *Hindustan Gadar Party*, vol. 1, pp. 35-70; Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence*, pp. 148-175.

distinction. The Partition of 1947 was not inevitable. It was a contingent outcome of specific political choices. The Gadar Movement shows that different choices were possible.<sup>31</sup>

The third conclusion concerns what the post-movement trajectories of the leaders reveal. The divergence between Bhakna's secular-socialist path and Parmanand's Hindu cultural nationalist path was the most historically consequential divergence within the Gadar generation. It anticipated the larger ideological conflicts that shaped Indian political life through the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. These conflicts culminated in the catastrophe of Partition.<sup>32</sup>

The fourth conclusion concerns the movement's transnational character. The Gadar Movement's leaders were among the first genuinely transnational Indian political activists. They built networks connecting California to Punjab to Japan to Berlin. They understood their struggle as part of a global resistance to colonial domination. The Hindu-German Conspiracy showed the genuinely strategic dimension of this transnationalism. The movement was not simply seeking solidarity. It was actively trying to use global geopolitics for the purpose of colonial liberation.<sup>33</sup>

The fifth conclusion concerns moral legacy. The Gadar Movement failed in its immediate objective. The February 1915 uprising was suppressed. Its leaders were executed or imprisoned. Its organizational infrastructure was destroyed. But the nature of its failure created a moral legacy more enduring than many movements' successes. Kartar Singh Sarabha was hanged at nineteen. Sohan Singh Bhakna was transported for sixteen years. This sacrifice gave the movement a moral authority that organizational achievement alone could never have generated. Bhagat Singh's explicit acknowledgment of his debt to Sarabha made this lineage of revolutionary inspiration concrete and personal.<sup>34</sup>

The sixth and final conclusion concerns the contribution of the Gadar Movement to the development of Indian nationalist ideology. The movement was the first organized political force to demand complete and immediate independence from British rule. It was the first to insist that all Indians, regardless of religion, caste, or region, were equal stakeholders in the national struggle. Its secular and egalitarian character was ahead of its time. It planted seeds of political consciousness that would bear fruit in the decades that followed.<sup>35</sup>

## VI. CONCLUSION

The comparative study of the Gadar Movement's leadership undertaken in this paper has sought to show something important. The movement's historical significance does not lie mainly in its organizational achievements or its military planning. It lies in the intellectual and political vision that its leaders, together and individually, embodied and articulated. That vision was plural, contested, and internally complex. But this complexity was not a weakness. It was the source of the movement's remarkable ability to speak to the full diversity of the Indian diaspora's experience. It allowed the movement to build, however temporarily, a cross-communal coalition that remains one of the most remarkable achievements in the history of South Asian politics.<sup>36</sup>

The typological framework developed in this paper identifies five distinct modes of revolutionary leadership: the philosopher-revolutionary, the patriarchal organizer, the martyr, the spiritual revolutionary, and the cultural nationalist intellectual. This framework reveals the structural logic of the movement's diversity. It shows how different leadership types addressed different constituencies. It shows how each type contributed different and essential elements to the revolutionary enterprise.

Bhai Parmanand's place within this framework is as the cultural nationalist intellectual. His synthesis of Arya Samaj Hindu cultural nationalism with anti-colonial revolutionary commitment placed him at the centre of the movement's deepest internal tension. This gives his figure an importance within Gadar historiography that existing scholarship has not yet fully recognized. The one dedicated modern

<sup>31</sup>H.K. Puri, *Gadar Movement*, pp. 55-75; M. Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*, pp. 95-120; Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence*, pp. 155-175; Barbara D. Metcalf and Thomas R. Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 78-115; R.C. Majumdar, *The Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857* (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1963), pp. 1-25.

<sup>32</sup>H.K. Puri, *Gadar Movement*, pp. 215-235; M. Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*, pp. 215-240; G.S. Deol, *The Role of Gadar Party*, pp. 100-120; H.K. Puri, *Reflections on Gadar Movement* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 2013), pp. 70-95.

<sup>33</sup>D. Dignan, *The Indian Revolutionary Problem in British Diplomacy*, pp. 35-100; A.C. Bose, *Indian Revolutionaries Abroad*, pp. 130-165; L.P. Mathur, *Indian Revolutionary Movement in the United States*, pp. 100-155; H. Fischer-Tine, *Shyamji Krishnavarma*, pp. 120-155; M. Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*, pp. 140-178.

<sup>34</sup>H.K. Puri, *Gadar Movement*, pp. 215-235; M. Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*, pp. 200-225; G.S. Deol, *The Role of Gadar Party*, pp. 100-120; Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence*, pp. 175-195; Khushwant Singh and Satindra Singh, *Gadar 1915*, pp. 120-140.

<sup>35</sup>Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence*, pp. 162-180; Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India: 1885-1947* (New Delhi: Macmillan, 1983), pp. 100-130; Barbara D. Metcalf and Thomas R. Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, pp. 78-115; R.C. Majumdar, *The Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857*, pp. 1-25.

<sup>36</sup>H.K. Puri, *Gadar Movement*, pp. 215-235; M. Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*, pp. 215-245; H.K. Puri, *Reflections on Gadar Movement*, pp. 55-85; G.S. Deol, *The Role of Gadar Party*, pp. 100-122.

biography of him, K. Sharma's *Bhai Parmanand: A Nationalist Life* (2009), is valuable as a factual record but limited by its hagiographic approach. Parmanand's story is not simply the story of one man among many. It is a window into the deepest questions that the Gadar Movement raised and that independent India inherited. Those questions remain open and urgent today.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>K. Sharma, *Bhai Parmanand: A Nationalist Life* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2009), pp. 1-20; Bhai Parmanand, *The Story of My Life*, pp. 1-30; H.K. Puri, *Gadar Movement*, pp. 55-80; K.W. Jones, *Arya Dharm*, pp. 145-168; K.C. Yadav, *Arya Samaj and the Freedom Movement*, pp. 112-140.

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