

FOREWORD

What can it be that makes the mind of the revolutionary tick?

What would it be like to walk a few yards in the shoes of a revolutionary? What kind of song would he hum? What pace would his pulse race, his heart beat? What would it take to sacrifice one's youth for nation's sake? What would it be to bristle with patriotism at the utterance of *aazaadi*, the Indian revolutionary's clarion call for liberty?

What would it be like to leave home, and near and dear ones, and go and live in hiding, waiting for a day when there arrives enough strength in the will and enough force in the flesh to rise and take on the oppressor, and break the shackles of debilitating serfdom?

The answers aren't easy. But some things are certain. If his cause is big enough, the revolutionary is willing to pay the ultimate price with his life. He will give up the material life to seek freedom for his people. Freedom from oppression and tyranny. Freedom from injustice. Freedom from penury. No matter how great the peril, how difficult the goal, he'll strive tirelessly.

The true revolutionary will usually stake his all to break the shackles of tyranny and oppression, injustice and penury, and breathe that air of freedom. In the words of Jamaican legend Bob Marley, "better to die fighting for freedom than be a prisoner all the days of your life."

Oh, if only there were such patriotic heroes today!

COMPELLING

That is why revolutionaries make compelling stories. Just to know why they did what they did. Not all revolutionaries are successful in what they attempt. Not all escape alive. Not all live to see their dreams come true. In South Africa, Steve Biko did not. In Latin America, Che Guevara did not. In India, Subhas Chandra Bose did not. In order to smell the air of freedom, the revolutionaries do stake their very last breath. Such sterling stuff, that which filmmakers rush to immortalize in motion pictures.

The more one gets into it, the more it becomes clear that the mind of the revolutionary is sparked, shaped and set into action by injustice and oppression. History doesn't lie. When the route of peace is cut off, the road to revolution has usually been the answer. Sometimes it has been the only answer. Revolutionaries like to walk the path of armed resistance, talk the language of warfare, revenge and force to take on their opponents. Usually, the greatest foe is the

state, the symbol of tyranny that must be brought down and shattered. Revolutionaries create a cause that they can sell and that which people can easily buy.

DISCRIMINATION

The minds of the revolutionaries that floated the Hindustan Association of the Pacific Coast and later the Gadar newspaper in November 1913, were similarly sparked. Their cause was big enough, and they were willing to lay down their lives. They were stoked by the undying flames of patriotism. They were fuelled by a deep desire to set their motherland free from bondage. The Gadarites, as we call the Gadar revolutionaries, lived overseas and were tormented by bitter racial discrimination. Being Indian was enough to be vilified and abused publicly, and not just for the colour of their skin. In the land of plenty, they were just filthy coolies spoiling the American environment. Because of their slave-like status in India, they were easily disparaged and ridiculed in America. They always worked hard and there was plenty of monetary gain to be made in return. But the pain of suffering ridicule, rife and ribaldry completely offset all that gain. As they kept doing better, draconian laws came into place to keep them away from entering the USA and Canada. For the Gadarites, it was a discriminatory world, both at home in India, and away in America.

SPUNK AND CHARACTER

The Gadarites were young men with dreams, and plenty of courage. The bulk was made up of Punjabi farmers that had arrived in the west coasts of USA and Canada in the first decade of the 20th century. The intellectual capital came from young Indian students and teachers in prestigious institutions such as Berkeley and Stanford. They came mainly from Punjab, and a few from Maharashtra, from Bengal, and other parts. Together they rose, and gave the call for Gadar—meaning mutiny—to free India. Force was their way, and storming the empire’s citadel, the final goal.

In 1913, at a place called the Yugantar Ashram in San Francisco, California, the Gadarites gave the call for *aazaadi*. In many ways, it was the precursor to the other known pre-Independence revolutionary movement by the Azad Hind Fauj under Bose. An estimated 8,000 overseas Indians played a direct part in the Gadar movement.

Remember, it was also a time in Indian history when Mahatma Gandhi was away, yet to return from his life-changing experience in South Africa. The method of Satyagraha that he practiced there was as yet an alien concept to Indian minds. The armed revolt of 1857 in India and the American Revolution of 1776 in the USA were the ideological templates available to the Gadar revolutionary. In both instances, the adversary was the same—Britain’s repugnant colonial machinery. The Gadarites knew that allowing the British to trample all over India, allowing them to milk India systematically and drive Indians deeper into penury and debt, would plunge their motherland indefinitely into serfdom. And that is why their daring is so compelling. “The sin of silence when they should protest

makes cowards of men,” said Abraham Lincoln. The Gadarites threw silence to the winds and roared in unison.

SHORT LIVED

Not all stories have happy endings. The romantic story of the Gadar patriots was destined to be ephemeral, and not unexpectedly. The Gadarites had daring, but the British had tact, guile, ammunition, specially set up fast-track courts, and horrific jails. It was almost a mismatch. Each time they tried to make a dent, the Gadarites were vanquished even before they could reach the gates of the citadels. Each time they tried to bombard the bastions, their efforts blew up in smoke. The enemy’s wherewithal was too much for the young, brave men. They were arrested and thrown inside jails unfit for humans. Significantly, the British espionage system delivered when it mattered, time and time again. Most of the men feeding this well-oiled spy system were, tragically enough, Indians themselves. They were the *gaddaars*—traitors—to the core who let down the patriots and their own country over and over.

OUR PATRIOTS, THEIR TERRORISTS

History through the eyes of the British administrators typecasts these revolutionaries as criminals, terrorists and seditionists, simply because they had the audacity to challenge the empire. The fact is that like anywhere else in the world, they were freedom loving people. Nothing more. Nothing less. Quite a few of them had withstood hostility to become rich by working very hard. They owned large tracts of farmland in USA and Canada. Some diversified into other businesses, including trading. The majority that went to North America was able to bring about a sharp and positive turnaround in its own economic fortunes, compared to what things were at home in India. Yet, for the sake of freedom, for the sake of nation, they gave up their business interests, their enterprise, their land, their wealth and their youth. What great heroes they were. What they could never give up, though, was the springing, eternal hope to accomplish the larger dream—to see India free one day.

POWER OF PEN

Thousands of copies of the Gadar newspaper would be shipped to different parts of the world. The readers would be mostly young men who had enlisted in the British army or other wings of the administration in places far and wide like Hong Kong, Singapore, London, Penang, Siam, Malay, Burma, Shanghai, Tokyo, Manila. The views of those that could not comprehend or read were shaped by the ones who explained the contents of the Gadar newspaper to them. They were exhorted not to fight for an army engaged in World War I, because the same army would perpetuate British rule in India, and slavery of the Indian people. The words were inked with such power and force that they quickly sparked emotions, stoked patriotic flames, and encouraged the young men to join hands against the British.

Pitted against a powerful adversary, their heroics were short lived. When the

Gadarites were arrested, British special courts conducted swift trials to have them executed or imprisoned. The state of the prisons, especially the cellular jail at Andaman and Nicobar Islands, was such that many Gadarites chose to die instead of suffering malnutrition, animal-like labour, and the cruelty inflicted upon them by British prison officials. But the impact of the Gadar movement was lasting.

STAMP OF GADAR

Indian Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh released a stamp commemorating the centenary of the Gadar movement at the 10th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas at Kochi, Kerala on January 8, 2013. It was followed by a Gadar Oration by Professor Harish Puri, author and professor. In 2013, at the Indian Republic Day function at the Consulate General of India in San Francisco, Mr Inder Singh, Chairman of GOPIO International released the Gadar stamp along with India's Consul General. Mr Singh who immigrated to the USA from Punjab in the 1960s and lives in California, the American state where it all started 100 years ago, is the inspiration behind the Gadar book. His research on Gadarites is monumental, his drive and perseverance to make the Government of India acknowledge the forgotten Gadar movement in its Centennial year, extraordinary.



**SAYANTAN
CHAKRAVARTY**

As of now, let's all live with the simplicity of it all. The patriotic members of the Gadar party had powerful dreams. Some died without seeing their beloved India free from foreign rule. Some lived to see the beauty of their dreams come alive through India's Independence in 1947, nearly 28 years after the movement had been completely crushed by the British. It was a moment in time when all they'd lived for, all they'd given up their youth for, had come true.

In Gadar's Centennial year, this book that includes many character sketches, is a tribute to the collective determination and abiding love for Mother India that these men displayed in abundance. It is also a tribute to the way their revolutionary minds ticked over.

Gadar, indeed, it was.

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