

THE PUNJABI DIASPORA SERIES No. 4

# **Gopal Singh Chandan**

A Short Biography and Memoirs

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## CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

General Editor's Introduction

Gopal Singh: A Short Biography

Education and Craft

Family Life

Connections Abroad

A Passage to Kenya

Community Work

As a Trade Union Leader

Return to Punjab

Family Affairs

Faith Writings and Personality

As Journalist and Writer

A Faithful and Humble Sikh

Personality: Between Father and Son

Gopal Singh Chandan: Memoirs

Appendix: Ghadr Kirti Connections with Kenya

Glossary

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In writing this profile of my father, in addition to my own memories as the youngest son in the family, I have relied exclusively on a 25-page letter of my uncle Niranjan Singh in response to my enquiries regarding the family's past. I acknowledge his help, wit and charm at the age of 92, and the pride of the last scion of our conglomerate family.

The second major source for this biography is my father's memoirs which he wrote during 1967, at home, in Nakodar after his return from Kenya. These memoirs are reproduced here in English translation after the biographical sketch. Perhaps, realising he may not live too long, my father wrote from memory almost in a random fashion in Punjabi; obviously some of the things which he felt more important were noted first. But he did not leave a complete autobiography, nor for that matter are his memoirs comprehensive enough. I recall how he started writing on a foolscap size register given to him as a present by Ambu Patel – a Kenyan master binder. His memoirs covered a little of family's history with selected details from his life. The Register of his memoirs was unfortunately lost. Luckily, I had made photocopies of some pages by then. I have since donated this photocopied material to Desh Bhagat Yadgar, Jalandhar catalogued there as, 'Yadgar Archives No. 5313: Gopal Singh Chandan, *Mera Jivan* [My Life], Punjabi handwritten manuscript, Nakodar, 1967'.

The loss of my father's memoirs register was further confounded as our Nakodar house was searched in 1970. This was during the Naxalite movement in Punjab when I was absconding. In that search, police took away much material; this included several family photographs, books and papers including my father's other writings. Despite many endeavours to retrieve these papers, my efforts in this direction proved unsuccessful and all our family papers and valuables are now sadly lost forever. In my enquiries I was also alarmed by the information that public records in East Punjab are destroyed every five years. Despite my persistent pleas to some historians and academics, including a Member of Parliament, to raise this issue with the government, the matter remains unclarified. It has confirmed my belief that it is not only politicians who are afraid of history.

Readers should also note a further source on my father's life. Zarina Patel, a Harvard-educated academic of Nairobi, is finishing a biography of Makhan Singh, a major figure in East African Trade Movement and nationalist struggle. My father and Makhan Singh were close friends who worked together for several years. Hence Makhan Singh's biography will also shed light on my father's role in East African trade unionism. For this biographical sketch I thank Zarina for suggesting some stylistic changes in the narrative.

Translating my father's memoirs from Punjabi into English has been an emotional journey for me. Through these fragmented memoirs I have accompanied him in his sojourn to Kenya and back sharing equally his anguish and hopes. While in an age when leaving home hardly makes a story, my father's love affair with his East African roots conveys something of a unique and especially Punjabi tale. Writing about my father and his writings, both as his son and as a critical reader, has necessarily put me under spot. I remain acutely conscious of certain difficulties in conveying my father's true feelings on matters close to his heart. Nevertheless, I have tried to sketch his life objectively, only towards the end, under the section 'Between Father and Son' I have taken liberty to express my sentiments and feelings that I cherish and continue to nurture towards my father.

My sincere thanks to Bhagat Singh Bilga, President of Desh Bhagat Yadgar Jalandhar and a close friend of my father, who on my request, sent Charanji Lal Kanganiwala and Vijay Bambeli to the families of Ghadris/Kirtis of Kenya – Devinder Singh, Suba Singh and Mota Singh in their villages in Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur and Amritsar to obtain their photographs. Om Prakash Sharma of Behbalpur, now settled in Vancouver, provided me further information about his close comrade Mota Singh.

Thanks are also due to Dr. Darshan S. Tatla who not only encouraged me to write this sketch to rediscovered my father and also for publishing it in the Punjabi Diaspora Series – a valuable project

to record overseas Punjabis' unheard and neglected voices. My elder brother Swaran has kindly checked many details and also provided some photographs he had preserved over the years.

My sons Sukant and Navroz, deserve thanks for their comments as its first readers and who are the torchbearers of their grandfather's legacy. Our cat Billu gave me company sitting on my desk while I typed.

*Amarjit Chandan*



**Gopal Singh Chandan. 1940**

## PREFACE

**P**unjabis, especially Sikhs from rural Punjab have been settling abroad for over a century now. However, our knowledge about their lives in the new world is quite nebulous. We rarely hear their voices as individuals. For such questions as to why they went abroad, how their passage was arranged across the seas and what was the reception accorded to them in the new country, there are no personal narratives or impressions left by individuals involved. Similarly, questions such as how they kept in touch with their families and how they remembered their ex-homes and the land they left behind through letters and remittances find no answers. As to larger and more reflective questions of what was their idea of 'home' or of 'homeland', or what Punjab meant to them or even a larger entity 'India' stood for them becomes even more problematic in view of very limited first hand evidence<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> See Darshan S. Tatla, *The Sikh Diaspora*, London: UCL Press, 1999; *Sikhs in North America*, Westport, Greenwood Publishers, 1991; *Sikhs in Britain*, Coventry: University of Warwick, 2nd ed. 1994 [With Eleanor Nesbitt]. Also >Imagining Punjab: narratives of nationhood and homeland among the Sikh Diaspora' in *Religion, Ethnicity and Culture: New perspectives in Sikh Studies*, [eds.] C. Shackle, Gurharpal Singh & Arvindpal Singh Mandair, London, Curzon Press, 2001.

A very partial reconstruction of overseas Punjabi lives is possible from existing sources which are mainly governmental files. Thus we find two major episodes of the Punjabi Diaspora; e.g. Ghadar Party and Komagata Maru voyage have found several studies based mainly on the evidence gathered by a network of official agencies. As the Ghadar Party quickly took shape amongst its fiery band of supporters centred around its campaigning weekly, *Ghadr*, the governmental agencies started gathering extensive information of individuals involved, especially keeping a close watch on its German connections and then formulated policies to block and neutralise its propaganda and the passage of men returning to Punjab with avowed aim of overthrowing the British power from India. As the Ghadar rebellion was crushed in Punjab by especially enacted laws which consigned scores of men to gallows, while hundreds were harshly put behind the bars for life. Finally, a trial in San Francisco during 1918-19 extinguished its main centre in the Pacific States. Still, several of them survived to narrate their tales. Though written in a patriotic fervour, even such heroic accounts shed some light on their personal lives as well<sup>2</sup>. Among the Ghadarites, only Lala Hardayal has earned a critical biography while lives of other prominent figures such as Sohan Singh Bhakna, Kartar Singh Sarabha, among others remain relatively obscure with mere hagiographic accounts<sup>3</sup>. One only need to see a highly investigative biography of an America woman as an example of earlier contacts of indigenous population with Ghadarites<sup>4</sup> and then compare Jawala Singh, Wasakha Singh, Ratan Singh, Santokh Singh and Teja Singh Sutantar who had led such colourful lives but have inspired no critical biographies. Similarly, an old exile Ajit Singh who returned in 1947 remains an obscure figure. For the Komagata Maru voyage we have several official reports and news but for all its retrospective revision, nothing matches with a classic account of the voyage as *Zulmi Katha* by its chief architect Gurdit Singh<sup>5</sup>.

In Britain where Dalip Singh, son of Maharajah Ranjit Singh lived as a sort of exile, his life became a public spectacle. He has attracted several biographies though more speculative on his Oriental discretion than his tragic dilemma for return to his homeland, Punjab. His mother Jindan [d. 1856] on the other hand continues to get emotional poetic response from Punjabi bards without any exhaustive biography<sup>6</sup>. Other lesser exiles such as Baba Ram Singh who was banished to Burma or Maharaj Singh to Malaysia have left no memoirs or records. Even much-eulogised and popular hero, Udham Singh's life prior to his trial for the murder of Punjab Governor, Michael O'Dwyer in London remains in shade despite considerable official documents released recently<sup>7</sup>. Similarly, Makhn Singh who played a prominent role as a trade unionist in colonial Kenya awaits a full length autobiography.

Of the early twentieth century Punjabi emigrants, we find only a few who have left their memoirs, these include, Teja Singh, Dalip Singh Saund, Sohan Singh Bhakna and Sadhu Singh Dhama<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> See section on autobiographies and biographies section in D. S. Tatla, *The Ghadar Movement: a guide to sources*, [Amritsar 2003]

<sup>3</sup> Brown, Emily C. *Har Dayal: Hindu revolutionary and nationalist*. Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 1975.

<sup>4</sup> Mackinnon, Janice R. Nd Mackinnon, Stephen *Daughter of the revolution: the life and times of an American radical*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

<sup>5</sup> Gurdit Singh *Zulmi Katha*. Amritsar 1922.

<sup>6</sup> Ganda Singh, *The Duleep Singh Correspondence*, Patiala: Punjabi University, 1977. Also see M. Alexander and S. Anand, *Queen Victoria's Maharajah*: London, 1980. C. Campbell, *Maharajah's Box: the imperial story of conspiracy, love and a guru's prophecy*, London, 2000. However, the best sources for Duleep Singh's life are still Lady Login's, *Sir John Login and Duleep Singh*, London, 1890 and *Lady Login's recollections 1820-1904*, London 1916.

<sup>7</sup> Avtar Johl and Navtej Singh. *Life of Udham Singh*, Patiala: Punjabi University Press

<sup>8</sup> Teja Singh, *Jivan kahani: Raj yogi sant Attar Singh ji maharaj de varosae sewak sant Teja Singh ji di apni kalm ton likhi hoi, bhag dooja, Gurdwara Baroo Sahib, 1989*. Dalip Singh Saund, A Senator from India.

Although hardly written as autobiographies as we understand them now, nevertheless such memoirs and notes depict individuals' struggles and endeavours. Few Sikhs who became quite successful such as Mayo Singh have left little details of their lives. Among existing records relating to the pre-partition Punjabi emigrants, besides official files, contemporary newspapers are the only other sources. While newspapers established by overseas Punjabis are useful, Punjab papers frequently carried news especially of overseas donations to Punjab causes, the *Khalsa Samachar*, *Akali te Pardesi*, *Pardesi Khalsa* and others can yield considerable insight into diasporic philanthropical assistance<sup>9</sup>. Among other almost random pieces of overseas narratives are letters written by Punjabi soldiers about their impressions of war in Europe while recovering from wounds in Brighton's hospital<sup>10</sup>. Or there is an odd fictional account of a Sikh hawker in Australia at the turn of the twentieth century<sup>11</sup>.

For the pre-partition period, on the whole, one finds few migrants have left any memoirs, diaries, autobiographies or recorded statements. In a nutshell, we have few first hand personal experiences to imagine or share early Punjabis' conditions in the new world. One obvious reason for the lack of memoirs or any other form of records by the earlier generation of settlers was, of course their social milieu. Coming from a predominantly rural background with little or no schooling, they put little value on writing about their own lives and indeed few had the requisite leisure or pursued professions which would have given them such inclination. Most were engaged in manual jobs. Thus we have almost no knowledge of pre-1900 emigrants, except through some official files how police or army men were recruited from Punjab for the Far East, especially Malaya and Hong Kong. Similarly, how earlier recruitment of Punjabi workers took place remains sketchy except when we meet these workers through official files of Ugandan railway records showing the progress of the Railway line being constructed by contractors. Apart from such records, even those are yet to be discovered, we have hardly any memoirs left by these individuals.

For the post-1947 period with the tempo of Punjabi emigration picked up and increased to all-time high in the 1960s, surprisingly, even for this period there are few accounts. A slight compensation for this period is the appearance of creative literature published by Punjabi workers under several genres; fiction, poetry and travel accounts. This is particularly noteworthy in Britain and Canada which account for a major share of post-partitioned Punjabi emigrants. Such fiction and prose accounts undoubtedly enrich our understanding of various facets of overseas Punjabis' lives. Thus for example, a semi-autobiographical novel re-constructs pioneer Sikhs lives as they were settling into lumber industries of British Columbia<sup>12</sup>. Another novel from Britain depicts a most daring and heroic effort of an illegal group of immigrants into Britain<sup>13</sup>.

There is thus overall lack of personal voices in the literature relating to the Punjabi Diaspora. In order to make up for this deficiency, Punjab Centre for Migration Studies is embarking on a series of biographies drawing either on written sources in case of past personalities, or recorded interviews for contemporary persons. It is hoped, such a format of short biographies will encourage other Punjabis, at least those who are skilled and eminent in some fields, to write and describe their lives thereby inform and enrich the Punjabi public domain and discourse.

15 March 2004

**Darshan S. Tatla**

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<sup>9</sup> See D. S. Tatla, 'Khalsa Samachar as a source for the Sikh Diaspora', *Journal of Sikh Studies*

<sup>10</sup> David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj, The Indian Army 1860-1940*. London, Macmillan, 1994.

<sup>11</sup> David Martin, *Man in the Red Turban*. London: 1978

<sup>12</sup> S. S. Dhama, *Maluka*, Vancouver

<sup>13</sup> Harish Malhotra, *Jaali awasi*, Jalandhar. 1988.

## Gopal Singh Chandan A Short Biography

Gopal Singh was born in August 1898 in Khankhana – the village of his maternal grandparents about thirty miles from Nakodar. His father, Nand Singh, and mother, Inder Kaur, lived in Nakodar. They were part of a large household consisting of Nand Singh's other two brothers, Dalip Singh and Ishar Singh along with their father Radha Singh and his brothers. The family traces its origins to Nakodar for at least three centuries and to an ancestral home which lay in the centre of a Mohalla called *Tondonan da*, a congested dwelling between Devi Talāb and the municipal offices built during Maharaja Ranjit Singh's time.

The family's ancestors had probably migrated from a neighbouring village Maherhu and settled in Nakodar in the early nineteenth century. Nakodar was and still remains a small town. It became a *tehsil* of Jalandhar, with a population of about 5,000 in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Niranjan Singh, a cousin of Gopal Singh, who started his teaching career at Sikh National College Lahore in 1938, maintains that the family's forefathers originally came from Bhambri in Gurdaspur district and settled in village Maherhu near Nakodar. It is difficult to confirm in the absence of any other corroborating evidence. The genealogical records kept with the *pandās* of Haridwar and Pehova, however, confirm a family tree from the 17<sup>th</sup> century with the name of Dhareja – the son of the earth. Since then, family members have taken up the surname, Nijrān or Nijhar which are derived from Najjar in Arabic meaning beautiful. However, Gopal Singh started calling himself Chandan. Other family members stuck with Nijhar or Nijrān. The family of Charan Singh, Gopal Singh's oldest son, uses the surname Nijrān while the other son's family has adopted Nijhar as its surname.

Gopal Singh's grandfather, Radha, was the first to break from the traditional occupation of the family as potters, who kept horses, mules and donkeys and would transport goods from plains to the hills. Starting with Radha's generation, the family members shifted away from their traditional occupation. A few members of the family, including Radha Singh took up employment as *munshis* for the brick-kiln owners in Jagraon, a small town in Ludhiana district.

Alongside occupational changes for the family came social transformation too. Under the influence of the Singh Sabha movement, Radha and his sons, Mallu, Dallu and Issar were baptised. They were Nakodar's first family of *amrit-dhari* Sikhs and changed their names to Radha Singh, Nand Singh, Dalip Singh and Ishar Singh respectively. It also prompted them to learn Punjabi along with their neighbours, Tulsi Sehgal and Sewa Brahmin from a Mahant Raunqi of the local *udasi dera*. This enabled them to read Guru Granth Sahib and other classic *qissas* like Qadir Yar's *Puran Bhagat*, *Roop Basant*, Heer Waris and *kafts* by Ishar Das. Like many rural folks, the family also revered Sakhi Sarwar – a Muslim *pir* – whose origin goes back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century of Sayyed Ahmed who hailed from Sialkot. In the Nakodar area, an annual procession of *chaunkian* would start from Radha's house circulating through many villages in the Doaba region. As is well-known, religious boundaries were not that distinct in rural Punjab with population of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs living together sharing many folk and religious practices amongst the three communities.

Gopal Singh was the elder of Nand Singh's two sons, the younger being Khem Singh. As an impressionable youth, Gopal Singh was an enthusiastic supporter of the Singh Sabha movement. Indeed as the Singh Sabha movement preached against idol-worship, two members of the family, Ishar Singh and his nephew, Gopal Singh went further and demolished the *maqām* of Sakhi Sarwar in the courtyard. This must have been duly noted by others in the community as an offensive act, but this was a time when some of the wilder folk religious practices were being replaced by 'logical' traditions of standard faiths.

Gopal Singh was growing up in a household unusually affected by contemporary social and political developments. His father Nand Singh had gone abroad and returned greatly influenced by

the sacrifices of Ghadrites and other patriots. He acted often as volunteer crier carrying a large bell announcing the public meetings of *desh bhagats* patriots. He was also a well-known personality locally as he adopted an occupation of peddler, selling *gutkas*, *kanghas* and *karhas* from door to door earning meagre subsistence. Walking several miles daily, this must have contributed to his good health, if nothing for family income, he kept up this practice till his death in 1949. A *boharh* – banyan tree – planted by Nand Singh in the mohalla is firmly rooted, though his progeny is now scattered in distant lands.

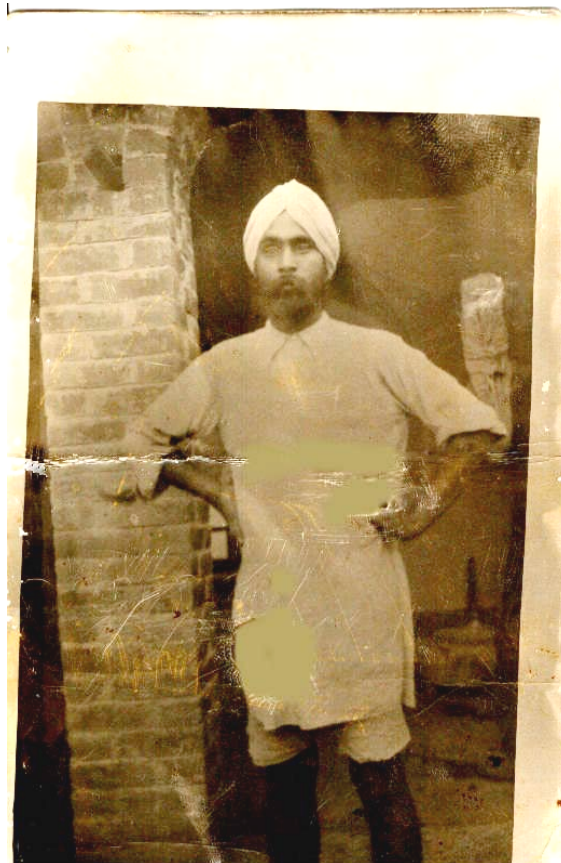


**Nand Singh. 1910. Vancouver**

### **EDUCATION AND CRAFT**

Gopal Singh grew up in Nakodar's pluralistic religious and cultural background. As a young boy, he was a keen learner in primary school and passed a test which would have enabled him to study at Khalsa Collegiate School, Amritsar. However, by this time, his father, Nand Singh had returned from Vancouver after working there for ten years as a watchman and a lumberjack in 1915. He insisted that his son should have training in practical skills that would secure him in employment opportunities. However, Gopal Singh seemed to have more interest in artistic ventures and certainly developed inclinations towards creative literature. As a young man, he felt angry enough to write an article for *Akālī* in 1921 criticising his father's instructions. Gradually, Gopal Singh became well versed in Urdu, Hindi and English, besides a firm command over his mother tongue Punjabi though passing the Giani examination of Panjab University in 1954. Almost with a vengeance, he started signing his new pieces of writings as by 'Chandan Giani Nairobi'. Such interaction between father and his rebellious and creative son suggests an early Punjabi case for psycho-analysis.

Along with his cousin Mohan Singh, Gopal Singh learnt the craft of carpentry from Gonda Singh Virdee, a master wood-carver of Shankar. With their generation, centuries old casteist tradition of work went through a radical change. Apart from nascent capitalist productive relations emerging in the Punjabi social system, the Singh Sabha movement may have been a factor in the change in family occupations. Gonda Singh faced the wrath of his clan for having non-*tarkhan* apprentices under him. After finishing their decade long apprenticeship, Mohan Singh became a daily wage earner carpenter, while Gopal Singh took a short term job with the railways at Gujjarkhan in western Punjab in 1919. In their leisure time, Gopal and Mohan would learn to recite patriotic poems. They would read such poetry at public meetings organised by Akali and Congress groups in Nakodar and the adjoining villages and towns. They also participated in Sikh Educational Conferences with much zeal. In keeping with his literary interests Gopal Singh also managed to meet several leading literary figures and social reformers of his period. In later life, he would recall proudly how he met Bhai Vir Singh, Puran Singh, the poet and Kartar Singh Hitkari, the father of Amrita Pritam and how he (Gopal Singh) cradled her in his arms when she was a baby. Mohan Singh had learnt music and would entertain the local public by playing live music on harmonium to accompany silent films occasionally shown in a big tent by touring companies and in the folk theatre of Ram Lila.



**Mohan Singh. 1930**

### **FAMILY LIFE**

In 1916, at the age of eighteen, Gopal Singh was married to Bant Kaur, a girl five years younger than him. With no schooling, Bant Kaur, like most women of the time was a God-fearing lady and proved to a dedicated wife and mother. Eventually Gopal Singh and Bant Kaur had a large family with four daughters, Mohinder Kaur, Amar Kaur, Surjit Kaur, Balbir Kaur and three sons Charan Singh, Swaran Singh and Amarjit Singh, their first child born in 1919 and the last in 1946.

As the birth dates of their children suggest, from the first daughter to the last son, his wife brought up her young children while Gopal Singh tried his hand at various professions and jobs at

many places and eventually sailed to Kenya in 1929. It was only in 1946 when he called his family to Kenya and their youngest son was born there. In the meantime, he would travel intermittently from Kenya to attend to his family affairs. That was the norm in those days, when young wives were left at home to bring up the family while men would work abroad for many years. Punjabi folksongs evolved during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century express young wives' pain of separation, longing and endurance. Ironically, none of folksongs express the anguish on part of the men who sailed abroad 'greedy for money' as the female protagonists in the folksongs always complain.

### CONNECTIONS ABROAD

Like many Eastern and Central Punjabis, especially Doabias of Jalandhar and Hoshiarpur districts, the Nijhars also share an early history of emigration abroad. Gopal Singh's uncle, Nand Singh's brother, Ishar Singh was first among the family to sail for Hong Kong in 1901. This was made possible through his marriage with Tej Kaur (d. 1967), sister of Babu Sundar Singh of Warha Jodh Singh. Babu Sundar Singh was a warden of Victoria gaol and had established a Sikh Diwan besides playing a considerable role in building the first gurdwara in Hong Kong. Bhai Bhagwan Singh Pritam, who later emerged as a leading Ghadr activist, was the first *granthi* of this gurdwara. The family legend recalls that when Ishar Singh took the sea passage from Calcutta, his possessions consisted of just three items; '*duree, chadar* and a set of *kurta-pyjama*'. A passport was not required then. Ishar's mother, Tabi accompanied him on foot to Phillaur railway station and the mother and son must have parted their ways with heavy hearts.



Ishar Singh. Manila, 1935

Babu Sundar Singh became an influential figure within the Hong Kong Sikh community. After his retirement, he returned to Punjab in 1912 and joined the Chief Khalsa Diwan. He was a prominent organiser of the Sikh Educational Conference held at Jalandhar in 1915 and as he rallied people to attend the conference, all members of the Nijhar family, young, old including women were present at this conference. Sundar Singh also served in Mosul, Iraq with the British army as a clerk. Early ties of Nijhar family were consolidated when Gopal Singh married his daughter Balbir Kaur to Hardev Singh, a grandson of Sundar Singh in 1954. The papers relating to Sundar Singh's life and

community work in Hong Kong as also his role during the first plague epidemic in Punjab were deposited in the British Library in 1998 and these are catalogued as MSS Eur C869.



**Sundar Singh. 1933**

Ishar Singh was employed as a factory watchman earning a princely sum of \$40 per month. As he felt settled, he called other members of the family. His cousins Narain Singh, Nand Singh and Dalip Singh sailed to join him. Ishar Singh then moved to the Philippines accompanied by another Sikh, Mohan Singh from Bilga. It is fair conjecture that the duo were the first Sikhs to land in Manila. Ishar Singh who had married Tej Kaur had their first son, Niranjn Singh born there in April 1912.

Like many other Sikhs in the Far East, Ishar Singh and Narain Singh looked to 'Mirkan' [America] as too enticing. After a brief stay in Manila, they emigrated further to Stockton in 1913, stayed there for some time but were probably disappointed by immigration restrictions and racial discrimination, and they returned to Manila. Indeed, Dalip Singh, a brother of Nand Singh returned with just 6 annas in his pocket. But their sojourn to Pacific States had created political awareness, they returned as sympathisers of the Ghadr Party's goals in its struggle against imperial rule in India. Niranjn Singh also believed that Dalip Singh met Lala Har Dyal, the founder of Ghadr Party in Canada and attended his lectures.

After a short stay in Nakodar, Gopal Singh's uncles again sailed for the Philippines in 1920. They then opened a grocery shop in Bayombong calling it *Messrs NE Daleep Singh*. Following Manila's Sindhis, they also became moneylenders. Gopal Singh's two uncles almost constantly travelled from Manila to Nakodar and back in the 1920 and 1930s while their wives remained behind looking after their young children. These men, one after the other, eventually returned to die in their hometown Nakodar during 1939-42.

However, while abroad, Ishar Singh, and all other members of the family took special care to preserve the 5Ks as strict Sikhs. It was much later when Mohan Singh, a cousin of Gopal Singh, became clean-shaven when he left for Manila in 1952. Gopal Singh never recovered from the shock from his cousin's blasphemous act. It was no compensation that Mohan Singh was soon re-baptised

and indeed became the *granthi* of the gurdwara in Manila and eventually returned to Nakodar after twenty years in 1971 and died soon afterwards.



**Dalip Singh. 1939. PHOTO BY NIRANJAN SINGH**

The exposure to foreign influence on the family showed itself in several ways. Narain Singh had asked his second wife Basant Kaur to study at Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Ferozepur. (Santokh Singh Nijran, the son of Narain Singh and Basant Kaur is now the headteacher of Punjabi School in Nottingham, England.) Similarly Dalip Singh enrolled his daughter Dhan Kaur at this school at a time when women's education was frowned upon. Gopal Singh's family in Nakodar was the first one to have open nationalist sympathies. Ishar Singh and Dalip Singh also started a *taal* – a shop of firewood and built a *pucca* house – first in Tondonan mohalla of Nakodar. As the only house built with ceramic bricks, this became the centre where all weddings in the local community were celebrated.

### **A PASSAGE TO KENYA**

Inspired by so many family members abroad, Gopal Singh was looking for an overseas opportunity. In March 1929, Gopal Singh went to East Africa through his own initiative. By then, emigration of Punjabi skilled workforce to East African colonies was almost three decades old. The British East African Company was established in 1888. The rule of Protectorate was enforced from Bombay, for administration and commerce. Gujarati *baniyas* and Parsee moneylenders settled in the colonies along with Punjabi Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs who were recruited in the police force. When in 1895 AM Jeevanjee of Karachi was awarded the contract to build Kenya-Uganda Railways, he sought his workforce from the Punjab. The first batch of 350 Punjabi men sailed to Kenya in the first year and in the next six years; their numbers had gone up to 31,895. However, after the completion of Railway Line, fewer than 7,000 men chose to stay in East Africa. In 1911, there were 12,000 Punjabis and Gujaratis as compared to three thousand Europeans. Most of the Punjabis worked as skilled workers and artisans, as bricklayers, carpenters, plumbers, tailors, motor mechanics and electrical fitters. In spite of Indian Emigration Act VII of 1922, thousands of Punjabis emigrated to Malaya and East Africa. In 1920 Kenya was declared a British colony.

Gopal Singh has described his passage across the sea in his memoirs fully and how he was assisted to settle in Nairobi by some fellow Sikhs. His first job was as a carpenter in the railways but he eventually started his own business in 1939. This was a photographer's shop named 'Gopal Singh Photographer' bought from Ram Singh [Matharu] photographer of Noor Mahal, an unusual occupation among the Sikhs at the time. Three years later the shop was renamed Star Studio. Gopal Singh worked as a photographer for almost two decades at Star Studio, which became a well-known place, at first sited in Duke Street now renamed Luthuli Avenue and later moved to Grogan Road now renamed Kirinyaga Road.

After spending three years in Nairobi, Gopal Singh returned to Nakodar in 1932 and established a photographer's studio employing a 'mint' camera with the assistance of Niranjan Singh. He bought a plot of land in Mohalla Bahadarpur on the outskirts of the town adjacent to Arya High School and built a house with his Kenyan income. It was a new locality, mostly developed by artisans who had gone abroad. In his spare time, he also acted as a ghost-editor of *Kirti* (The Worker) and contributed articles and poems under of the pseudonym 'Kamla Kirti'. Here, his house also became a hotbed of 'Moscow-returned' Kirti leaders. Bhagat Singh Bilga, Jaswant Singh Kairon, Harmohinder Singh Sodhi, Chanan Singh Dhakkowal and a few others would frequently meet and discuss contemporary issues. The foreign mail meant for the *Kirti* was delivered to his home, which was then collected by Gurcharan Singh Sainsra and despatched further.

During the five year stay in Nakodar, Gopal Singh managed to marry off his eldest daughter, Mohinder Kaur to Bir Singh of Palahi. He left again for Nairobi clandestinely in October 1937 with just 5 shillings (Rs 10) in his pocket. After settling there, he sent the sea fare for his family. His wife Bant Kaur along with daughter Balbir and son, Swaran sailed for Mombasa in December 1944. The adult single fare then was Rs 80. As the War was still on, steamer ships were not allowed to sail. Instead they had to travel in a dhow – a small ship with wooden hulls and lateen sails. On their twenty-one days perilous journey, Bant Kaur, who could remember just two *paaris* of *Japuji*, recited them frequently as the dhow bobbed and rolled in the rough sea. As they settled in Nairobi, the household was blessed with their youngest son, Amarjit, born in November 1946.

### COMMUNITY WORK

Gopal Singh had immersed himself in the Kenyan Sikh community and played a leading role in the management of three Sikh institutions, Gurdwara Bazar, Gurdwara Singh Sabha and the Khalsa Boys & Girls School. The Sikhs were a well-established community in Kenya as compared to settlements in the Far East and Gopal Singh further consolidated it. His shop, Star Studio in Duke Street was running well. After the arrival of his family in 1945, its management was taken over by Swaran, his middle son in 1950. This arrangement provided well-deserved respite to his father who was keen to devote time for his social activities.

Thus relieved, Gopal Singh recommenced his community work with more vigour. Part of his time was spent in organising *kavi darbars*, he was popularly known as *Kaviji* poet. He became chief organiser of a literary society, Kavya Phulwari with several poets as its members. These poets would meet regularly and recite their compositions at various public places. They included Prem Singh Mastana Jogi, Giani Gian Singh Mahalpuri, Labh Singh Ragi of Amritsar, Harnam Singh Prachand, Hukam Singh Jachak, Pandit Tara Singh Nirvair Baloki, Mehar Singh Mehar, Arjan Singh Pardesi, Hira Lal Gandhi, Sita Ram Mangal, Gurdev Singh Dev, Wasdev Singh 'Watchmaker', Chaman Lal Chaman and Meharban Singh etc. They would follow a literary norm then widely prevalent of writing on an agreed theme with a common refrain – *traha misra*. Such compositions were eagerly listened to by the audience at *gurpurabs* and festivals of Vaisakhi, Basant, Eid and Diwali.



**Sitting from left - Gopal Singh Dukhiya alias Chandan, Kavi Prem Singh, Labh Singh Ragi, Gyani Gian Singh Mahalpuri and Sita Ram Mangal**  
**Standing from left - Makhan Singh, Bishan Singh of Barha Pind, Devinder Singh Dev (?) and Mehrban Singh. Nairobi. May 1933. PHOTO BY TL PATEL**

Gopal Singh also found time and money for the Ghadr Party activists in Kenya. Earlier three Punjabis Bishan Singh of Jalandhar, Ganesh Das and Yog Raj Bali of Rawalpindi were sentenced to death in Mombasa, Kenya in December 1915 charged among other things for possessing and distributing the Ghadr Party newspaper *Ghadr*. After an unsuccessful revolt in India in February 1915, the Ghadr Party was reorganised through the efforts of *Bhais* Rattan Singh, Santokh Singh and Teja Singh Sutantar with branches re-established in various countries. Between the two World Wars, Kenya became an underground conduit of the Ghadr/Kirti with Gopal Singh as one of its chief protagonists becoming a middleman for many revolutionaries *en route* to Moscow. *The Ghadr Directory* of 1934 lists Tirath Ram Bali, most probably a relation of Yog Raj, as an employee on the Uganda Railway, who was dismissed for distributing *Ghadr* in Kenya. Gopal Singh was introduced to the Marxian ideology by Devinder Singh of Sansarpur village, a fire brand communist and the secretary of Gurdwara Singh Sabha. Another revolutionary, Ujagar Singh Kirti alias Aujla of Boparai near Nakodar – a *granthi* at Gurdwara Bazar became an intimate friend, *pugg-vatt bharaa*. Both Devinder Singh and Ujagar Singh along with Suba Singh were sent to Moscow for revolutionary training.

Gopal Singh's progressive ideas and association with freedom struggle of East Africa also led him to advocate a more liberal philosophy for the Sikh faith and its institutions. He opposed in principle to the founding and managing of gurdwaras by particular caste groups only. Although, most managers of Gurdwaras Bazar and Singh Sabha in Nairobi were artisans, they resisted in joining hands with the caste-centred East African Ramgarhia Board arguing that it was against the tenets of Sikh religion. Similarly they kept their distance from the Namdhari Sangat, Balmik Sabha and did not support their separate gurdwaras. The Singh Sabha leadership indeed acted as a front organisation for the secular Ghadr/Kirti Party.



**Gurdwara Bazar, Nairobi. June 1939. PHOTO BY GOPAL SINGH CHANDAN**

This can also be seen through Gopal Singh and his friends' stand on an issue of public policy. The Central Muslim Association and East African Ramgarhia Board had sought separate electorates and reserved seats for themselves in the Legislative Council of Kenya. Gopal Singh and his associates denounced such demand as 'reactionary, disruptive and divisive'. In this cause, they found support from the Congress, the Agha Khan and his followers – East African Ismailis. As a matter of record, Makhan Singh went on a seven-day fast in June 1948 as 'a supreme effort to rouse the honest consciousness of the Indian people, and that of the leaders of the East African Indian National Congress and other organisations'. Eventually the issue of separate electorates was shelved.

Gopal Singh was able to accomplish another task dear to his heart in 1948 when, through his concerted efforts, the Punjabi language was introduced in some of East Africa's state schools. Moreover in 1953, *Budhimani*, *Vidvani* and *Giani* level classes were started in Nairobi. In this endeavour, Gopal Singh on his visit to Punjab in 1950 had sought assistance of Bhai Jodh Singh, 'Principal' Niranjan Singh and Giani Khazān Singh of Oriental College, Lahore. As a further token of his affection and concern for Punjabi language, he kept a large stock of Punjabi books in his shop selling them eagerly to youngsters and gave away some of these to various institutions. Gopal Singh was also a keen supporter of young Sikhs' participation in Kenya's games. So he was delighted when Mahān Singh, the founder of Kenya Hockey Association announced his nomination as a trustee of the Hockey Trust of Kenya in 1960.

### **AS A TRADE UNION LEADER**

After his second return to Kenya in 1937, Gopal Singh became involved in multifarious activities, from support for East African nationalist struggle to Sikh community projects. Indians of Kenya were mainly divided into two groups while supporting African nationalist and labour union struggles. The first were so called moderates; the Congress leaders established much earlier by the efforts of Mr. and Mrs. Savile Visram, and Jeevanjee brothers along with Shrinivas Laxman Thakur and R. V. Trivedi. Later in the 1940s and 1950s, Congress activists included A. J. Pandya, Devi Das Puri, S. G. Amin and Chunilal Madan. Although Gopal Singh was in the radical group, he developed widespread connections across a range of persons and organisations. Thus, Nahar Singh Mangat, an

influential Sikh, who turned from a revolutionary to conservative, joined the Congress and was elected to Legislature Council and eventually became a QC remained a close friend.

However, more enduring was Gopal Singh's friendship with Makhan Singh whose father Sudh Singh had tried to bring Asians and Africans together under a Railways Artisan Union in 1922. Makhan Singh was to emerge as an architect of Kenyan trade unionism. Throughout his career, Makhan Singh was supported by a family venture, Punjab Printing Press, established by his father. As a subsidiary labour organisation, Makhan Singh set up Press Workers Union with Karam Chand as president and himself as secretary. Then he established Labour Trade Union of Kenya [LTUK], formally constituted in 1935, with Ghulam Mohammed, a railway employee as its president. Two successive newspapers in Punjabi were launched in 1936 – the *Kenya Worker* and *East African Kirti* edited respectively by Makhan Singh and Mota Singh originally from Behbalpur, Hoshiarpur. Mota Singh (1910-2002) became a CPI activist in the Punjab and was jailed from 1939 to 1945. In 1937, the LTUK was renamed the Labour Trade Union of East Africa [LTUEA]. When Gopal Singh arrived in Kenya in 1937 LTUEA had successfully concluded its major action through a 62-day strike in Nairobi. More general strikes of Asians and Africans occurred in Mombasa during 1939. A strike by African railway apprentices in Nairobi during June resulted in the dismissal of 67 workers and led to considerable unrest in Mombasa. The LTUEA distributed leaflets in five languages and the strike soon spread to Tanga also along with meetings in Nairobi. A commission of enquiry was set up with Makhan Singh appearing as its principal witness. He blamed the administration saying, 'biggest responsibility lies with the government who for all these years has not cared the least for introducing measures for the workers'. With the World War II, severe reprisals were imposed on trade union activities. Makhan Singh was arrested in 1940 while on a visit to his Punjab home apparently at the instigation of Kenyan government and was detained for the next five years. More repressive measures were to follow which included banning the KCA and internment of its leaders.

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**From left Sita Ram Mangal, Makhan Singh, Kavi Prem Singh, Gopal Singh Chandan and two others. Railway Station, Nairobi. Jan 1950**

During the absence of Makhan Singh from 1940 to 1947, Gopal Singh became the acting General Secretary of the Union. This period saw several strikes despite the war years restrictions on trade union activities. In the beginning of 1940, it campaigned against the Trade Disputes (Arbitration and Inquiry) Bill moved in the Kenya Legislative Council. The Union sent a memorandum and as the bill was sent to a Select Committee, Gopal Singh testified before it as a witness. The Select Committee declined to accept union's suggestions against establishing an Arbitration Tribunal. As the war was on, the circumstances for trade union activities were far from conducive.

In September 1940, Indian railway workers submitted a memorandum to the railway administration seeking permanent jobs instead of temporary status. After a month of negotiations between railway officials and union leaders its leaders were arrested and released as workers threatened to strike. The strike was averted and the railway authorities granted some wage increases. In 1942 Indian workers again waged a campaign against introduction of *kipande* (certificate of employment) under Defence (Employment of Artisans) Regulations. Gopal Singh in his memoir described the joint campaign by the LTUEA and the East African Ramgarhia Artisan Union (EARAU) as his personal development into a professional campaigner as:

I used to consider myself as illiterate. On 13 June 1942, a public meeting took place in the Patel Brotherhood Hall, Nairobi. The government proposed a law for workers' skill tests and issuing certificates at the end of the working contract. We were against this move. I wrote down my speech in Punjabi. Pritam Singh, a colleague from Jhanjowal, did a good job of translating it into English. Prabhu Bhai, the Union President spoke in Gujarati and Kange did in English. As the majority of the audience was Punjabi-speaking, they looked restless. Pritam Singh suggested I

should speak in Punjabi. I interrupted Kange and started speaking. Seven thousand workers listened to me attentively. I felt rewarded and very confident.

On 8<sup>th</sup> November Gopal Singh and Arjan Singh Viridi, General Secretary of EARAU at a meeting of Ramgarhia Hall, Nairobi, reported the progress of talks regarding the withdrawal of *kipande*. The following day the authorities withdrew the proposed legislation signalling a victory for Indian workers.

As Makhan Singh returned to Kenya in August 1947 and resumed his political activities, the authorities took strong measures including a deportation order. The atmosphere of Indian, especially Sikh activists in Nairobi and elsewhere in Kenya was summarised by a British intelligence report in 1947 as follows:

The [LTUEA] is now in the process of revival by Makhan Singh, a Sikh, with strong communistic tendencies. His associates, [and this is a reference to Gopal Singh and other associates] of a like way of political thought are already in control of two Sikh temples, and thus are in a position to secure the support of the Indian labourers attending them. Their main theme is equal pay for equal work, irrespective of caste or creed, and this is a factor that will have to be reckoned with in Indian labour politics in the future. [*Indians in East Africa*, LPJ/12/663 British Library]

The authorities ordered Makhan Singh's arrest on 5 October 1948. Immediately, Gopal Singh and other friends filed an application for a writ of Habeas Corpus in the Supreme Court and eventually Makhan Singh was freed on 18 October 1948. In 1949, two strikes were launched by Asian and African workers. In May 1949, Makhan Singh was joined by Fred Kubai in organising the East African Trade Unions Congress [EATUC] with Fred Kubai as President and Makhan Singh as its General Secretary. Later Pranlal Sheth became its President. By the 1950s, new unions were forming, strikes were frequent and Makhan Singh directed trade unionism towards anti-colonial nationalist struggle, indeed the labour movement effectively turned into a militant vehicle for African political aspirations. In May 1950 Makhan Singh and Kubai were arrested and the Union was declared illegal. Despite a nine-day protest strike, which spread throughout Kenya, the government's action effectively destroyed the EATUC and terminated Makhan Singh's career as a trade union leader. He was removed to Nyeri and tried without a jury. Both Makhan Singh and Kubai were found guilty of leading an unregistered union and fined 110 Shillings each with the former also charged with another offence of being an undesirable immigrant. Makhan Singh was to be detained for the next eleven years, until October 1961 near the Ethiopian border.





**The Chandan Family. *Sitting from right – Gopal Singh Chandan, Amarjit (son), Bant Kaur (wife); Standing from right – Bir Singh husband of Mohinder Kaur, Swaran (son) and Balbir Kaur (daughter). Nairobi. 1950***

While providing support to the nationalist struggle, including the Mau-Mau uprising, Gopal Singh gradually earned the friendship of several African freedom fighters, including Jomo Kenyatta, Oginga Odinga, Acheing Oneko and Fred Kubai. In the Star Studio, Gopal Singh proudly displayed portraits of African friends personally photographed by him and would narrate how Kenyatta wore his shirt during the photograph session. As Kenyatta became the first President of Kenya, he was presented a blow-up of an earlier photograph by Swaran Singh. Rekindled by past memories and his association with Gopal Singh, Kenyatta remarked: ‘This photo had made me famous in the world.’

### **RETURN TO PUNJAB**

In 1957, Gopal Singh finally returned to Punjab. Now nearing his retirement age, he was suffering from stress and developed high blood pressure. He managed to build a mansion and named it ‘Chandanwari’. It was a proud achievement of a returning immigrant – a typical dream of every Punjabi from abroad. For his mansion, he meticulously planned all its woodwork, using motorised machinery, an innovation watched with fascination by other carpenters. In his house he also installed

a flush toilet system, the first of its kind in Nakodar. Of course, even during the early 1930s, he had taken pride in riding a Raleigh bicycle, another first in the town at the time.

Instead of leading a retired and peaceful life, Gopal Singh again had to establish a photographer's shop in 1961 retaining its old name, 'Star Studio'. He also worked diligently preparing photographic appliances by him self, these included a photo enlarger, a contact sheet printer, a heavy duty camera stand, studio light shades and glass showcases. His clients were mainly peasants around Nakodar who were busy applying for passports for immigration to England. In the early 1960s, a work-voucher system was introduced by the British government which facilitated many Doobias' passage to the UK. His studio was kept busy for some years developing hundreds of passport-sized photographs. It must have amused him while taking such photographs that he had returned to his native town while another wave of migrants were ready to leave their homeland. In 1960, he also led a successful one-day general strike as part of agitation against house tax imposed by the local municipality.

### **FAMILY AFFAIRS**

As head of a large family, Gopal Singh was always looking over his shoulders for money. With his rather artistic tastes, he could never put money as a first priority even when it was desperately needed for the family upkeep of his own family and other dependents. As his sons grew up to take command, Gopal Singh and indeed the whole family became dependent on Swaran Singh, the middle son. His eldest son Charan Singh who was working as a stonemason in Ugandan railways was disinherited for 'his indifference to the responsibilities of united family'.

It was not just the immediate family whose financial needs were to be met. There was further responsibility. He had to be financially responsible for his widowed daughter Amaro and her prodigal and handsome son Jaswant who was four years older than his youngest son, Amarjit. Jaswant's wild behaviour was causing much grief to all around him, moreover his father had committed suicide when he was just a baby. Jaswant's tantrums often created ugly scenes between Gopal Singh and his wife having rows over the upkeep of Jaswant as also over their disinherited son, Charan Singh. Eventually Jaswant was married, but arranging his wedding had cost Gopal Singh dearly, he had to mortgage a family house. Later Jaswant took his own life in 1981 leaving Gopal Singh's family as victims – with tragic consequences which are often encountered in a large extended Punjabi household. These family feuds left deep scars on the mind of Amarjit – the youngest son in the family. Gopal Singh's younger brother, Khem Singh (d. 1982) was totally absent from the family scene. Despite being a skilled carpenter Khem Singh, for most of his life chose to work for a musical brass band in Chandni Chowk, Delhi. He worked briefly as a music band master in Arya High School Nakodar.

### **FAITH, WRITINGS AND PERSONALITY**

Looking at Gopal Singh's career and his sojourns abroad and indeed of the family's early overseas connections, several questions arise naturally. What were the factors which pushed Gopal Singh out of Nakodar? Was it some sense of economic deprivation? Or was he swayed by distant lands' promise or sheer lure of 'across the black waters'? Certainly he was following the family's example when his elders as craftsmen were used to seek occupations away from home. Radha Singh was already working in Jagraon – some fifty miles away from Nakodar. They must have also heard of Sikh men being enlisted in the British Army who went overseas and some of these men then sailed abroad on their own. In the absence of oral narratives, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly how family members viewed their fortunes and opportunities. In case of Gopal Singh, it seemed certain that he was prompted to leave for Kenya not by the force of economic circumstances, but to be level with other members of the family. This was a process which ultimately saw Nijhar/Chandan family scattered from the Far East to the Western Hemisphere.

An uncommon element which affected Gopal Singh's household was its exposure to new political developments. His grandfather, father and other men in the family were influenced by the Ghadr Party propaganda which swept across various Punjabi colonies. The movement began with

the newspaper *Ghadr* published from San Francisco in 1913 which called all Punjabis and Indians to revolt against the British rule in India. Thus as my grandfather and his brothers returned home, they were active sympathisers of the Ghadr Party and believed in a struggle against imperialism and colonialism. Dalip Singh was found important enough to have been listed in the *Ghadr Directory* by the British Intelligence in 1934. It is known that after their return, Nand Singh and Dalip Singh were kept under police surveillance. Indeed, a family legend asserts a policeman had accompanied *baraat* – the wedding party of Gopal Singh in 1916.

### AS WRITER AND JOURNALIST

Besides his vocation as a photographer, Gopal Singh's favourite occupation was being a journalist and poet. He became a member of the Communist Party of India in 1960 and was a regular contributor to its daily newspaper *Nawan Zamana* from 1957. His writings also appeared in other periodicals such as *Kirti*, *Kirti Lehar*, *Lal Dhandora* and after independence in *Asha*, *Jeevan Prabhat*, *Punjabi Sahit* (Jalandhar), *Jeevan* (Bombay) and *Punjabi Duniya* (Patiala). Like other Punjabi writers of this era, he was attracted towards communism *sans* atheism and its shared ideals with Sikhism, namely humanitarianism, equality and freedom. He wrote under the pseudonym *Dukhiya* (Sufferer) till 1947 and thereafter switched to surname Chandan. In this, he followed close friends' advice to change his 'miserable' pen-name 'as India had now won its freedom'. His new name Chandan was perhaps as an ideal Sikh poet, emulating a bard of Guru Gobind Singh's court.

His one-act play *Santji Maharaj*, A Swindler Saint, was published in 1952. It was a social comment on self-styled Sikh saints who started visiting Sikh settlements abroad during the time and are now a permanent feature. A year later he produced a radio play *Punjabana*, [Punjabi Women], on the Voice of Kenya. He gave the manuscript of his eight one-act plays *Rataan Kalian* [Dark Nights], to a young journalist for his comments, who promptly reported the manuscript as lost. The man, a small-time hack in Jalandhar writes under the pen name Surjit Jalandhri.

His writings are mainly on aspects of Sikhism, India's freedom struggle and the workers' movement. A leather-bound handwritten volume of his poems during 1937-39, titled *Dukhiya dee Aaheen* [The workers' sighs], is preserved at Desh Bhagat Yadgar Library, Jalandhar. These poems are fine examples of patriotic flavour with an appeal to social justice and equality. His poetry allows us to examine the influence of Singh Sabha movement and the Ghadri-Kirti movement during the 1930-1940 period. He condemns the rich capitalist class, imperialists and calls for a struggle against caste-ridden social ethos. His studio-home became *adda* [centre] for communist activists of the time with stalwarts like Baba Bhag Singh 'Canadian', Munsha Singh Dukhi, Teja Singh Sutantar, Bhagat Singh Bilga and Harkishan Singh Surjit often visiting him. He was friends with Nanak Singh the novelist and 'Sant' Inder Singh Chakravarti, the Namdhari scholar. This was the kind of charged atmosphere in which his youngest son, Amarjit cut his literary and political teeth.

While it is a common practice in recent literary discussions to dismiss 'one-dimensional patriotic' Punjabi poetry written during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, understanding of such poetry needs far more careful and serious analysis. That several poets could find consensus on a political issue alerts us to the new awakening among Sikhs in the Punjab after the First World War. Moreover, political developments such as Ghadr, Babbar Akalis, and the Kirtis were mass movements in which popular and rhetorical poetry played major role in mobilisation and support. There soon emerged a number of 'stagey kavis' who read or sung their inspiring compositions to large political or religious gatherings; popular poets included, Gurmukh Singh Musafir, Vidhata Singh Teer and Chiraghdeen Daman. Such poetry often entertained, made fun of popular orthodoxies and had a strong moral appeal. Often poets combined an ironic wit and comic contradictions. Thus Gopal Singh's poetry impresses upon readers as slightly comic with a tinge of sadness. His memoirs are also noteworthy for lucidity and restrained emotions. There seem to be two keywords in his travelogue: fear and astonishment – fear of the unknown and astonishment at the present. Confessional and personalised Punjabi poetry was to appear later largely under the influence of modern European literature in the 1950s.

## A FAITHFUL AND HUMBLE SIKH

As a practising Sikh, he was a selfless man, indeed worthy as a *gurmukh*. In his youth, he was highly influenced by the Singh Sabha movement and indeed the whole family was transformed by their conversion to *amrit-dhari* Sikhs. Being a true Sikh of Nanak he did not shirk his social responsibilities. That was also the reason he himself did not go to Moscow for revolutionary training. He thought that it was his main duty to support his large family - four daughters, three sons, a son-in-law and a grandson - he never hankered after money and power. Content to maintain an honest living within his means, he died without accumulating any bank balance. Indeed, in Kenya he never could accumulate enough wealth to buy his own house and had to live with his family in rented accommodation. For this he was looked as a 'failure' by some members of his family.

In a photograph taken in 1925, Gopal Singh is wearing a *kirpan* – as he had taken *Amrit* a few years before, though in later life, he abandoned it. This is seen in an oldest photograph of the family taken in March 1925 on the occasion of Radha Singh's death lying in state on bier. The photograph shows Radha Singh's son, Ishar Singh, and grandsons Gopal Singh, Khem Singh, Niranjan Singh and their young sisters Raj and Jindo and Gopal Singh's eldest son, Charan Singh. Their faces present a surprising ambience than witness to the grief. It is fair conjecture that the camera was a new intrusion into Punjabis' life and on this occasion it had captured an awkward moment of cultural transformation.

As a keen participant in Kenya's Sikh community, Gopal Singh maintained a strict discipline as a Sikh, but he eschewed rituals. On his return to Nakodar, his visits to the local gurdwara became scarcer, as he saw the local practices of simultaneous multi-reading of the scriptures and keeping the *Adi Granth* under a fan as idol-worshipping and sacrilegious. In his personal diet, he ate meat, but refrained from alcohol. On his first voyage to Kenya in 1929, he carried a harmonium which he had assembled himself. He sang *shabads* which fellow-travellers joined in with while sailing through the Arabian sea. However he did not play the instrument or sing at home.

### PERSONALITY: BETWEEN FATHER AND SON

It was in Star Studio in Nakodar, Punjab, where Gopal Singh taught Amarjit, his youngest son and writer of this sketch the basic skills of a photographer's craft. The father and son would often travel to Jalandhar for Kendri Punjabi Lekhak Sabha meetings as my father was its member. There we would visit various newspaper offices, bookshops and sit among old revolutionaries at Desh Bhagat Yadgar. Copying father's articles in neat handwriting and posting them to various magazines and newspapers was to prove my initial training as a writer and as an editor. As a life member of *Preet Lari* when he read my first poem published in the magazine, he felt terribly proud of me.

My father belonged to the political tradition of mass movements. By the time I grew up, in the 1960s, political climate had changed in the Punjab. A Maoist terrorist movement swept through the youth in the Punjab and Bengal in the late 1960s. However, at the time, many factors had contributed to my conversion. In 1967 I had enrolled for postgraduate degree in English literature at Panjab University, Chandigarh. My fees and other expenses were being paid rather reluctantly by my brother Swaran from Kenya. The Vietnam war was its peak and a magic word of Naxalbari was circulating among campus' revolutionary romantics, among them Darshan Baghi, a student activist and sacked university employees' leaders, Daya Singh and Trilochan Grewal, and Jagmohan Singh, a nephew of Shaheed Bhagat Singh who was a student of Engineering College. Earlier at Lyallpur Khalsa College Jalandhar, I had edited a special issue of a journal *Bharat Sewak* for his Yuvak Kendra. The Kendra proved to be a recruiting agency for the Naxalite movement. Surrounded by such revolutionary rhetoric, I abandoned my education and started working as an apprentice journalist with *Nawan Zamana* and *Desh Bhagat Yadan* earning a meagre income.

In retrospect, the Naxalite revolutionary movement seems a strange combination of an ideology exhorting murder and embracing martyrdom. As my father learned of my incursion into the Naxalite movement, he felt deeply hurt and my mother also suffered many agonising days. They had

obviously pinned high hopes on their youngest son to make a good fortune and career like Niranjn Singh's sons. As a last resort to sway me away from the movement, I remember, on one occasion, he lashed me with a hockey stick; my sister Amaro took some of the blows herself. Then he wept bitterly and tried to dissuade me but I persisted in the futile struggle. Whenever I remember this episode, I cry for my father with remorse and feeling that he was right. Unable to desist me from my fatalistic path, he suffered in silence. Indeed I was to continue with my wayward path much after the death of my father. In August 1971, a Naxalite leader, Darshan Dosanjh murdered Makha Ram, a dalit *munshi* in the local brick kiln and snatched his wallet, gold ring and watch as trophies. Dosanjh would exhort Pash [1950-1988] and myself to become 'whole-timers'. I jumped on the bandwagon while Pash was arrested unawares and implicated in the murder case and later acquitted. I was declared a proclaimed offender for editing and publishing an underground magazine *Dastavez* [The Document]. I was arrested in August 1971 and tried in the court held in prison. I underwent sentence passed on me and was released two years later.

Over the years I have become known as a poet and prose writer. In turning to literature, I was unconsciously following my father's pursuits. Certainly, much of what I am now is because of him. The best compliment for my writing skills came from a literary critic who pointed out that I write in my father's style. I wish my father were alive to hear those words. In his friendly company I had literary and political training which shaped my creative imagination. Our house was a rich depository of books old and new, I donated these to Desh Bhagat Yadgar while leaving Nakodar. My parents' memories have inspired me to write several poems. Reading an account of my father leaving Bombay harbour – *Jahaaz ne whistle ditta, ehdi awaaz barhi bhaari see* – the ship blew its horn with a heavy heart, I composed a disturbing poem, *Jahaz da ghughu*. At places his comic account is tinged with sadness which reminded me often of Charlie Chaplin's 1917 film, *The Immigrant*.

As a professional photographer, he was quietly proud of his craft. He had bought an expensive Rolleiflex camera and would always carry it in his bag. On the eve of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Ghadr revolution in 1964, he took photos of the surviving Ghadrites who had especially assembled at Desh Bhagat Yadgar, Jalandhar. Among the luminaries, were Sohan Singh Bhakna, founder President of the Ghadr Party, Teja Singh Sutantar and many others. Sadly, due to his failing eyesight, photographs were out of focus and mis-composed. I can imagine how it would have been a shattering blow to him. Just imagine a life-long singer realising one day his voice is gone. I have kept the negatives but cannot summon courage to get them printed even now.

In personal appearance, he sported a meticulous dress sense, and always wore suits with a sky blue turban while oval-shaped spectacles adorned his eyes. He looked an ideal beau of a Sikh gentleman with his flowing beard, and was often amused when some travellers in trains or buses mistook him for a doctor! At the time he emigrated to Kenya, Punjabi men customarily wore white pyjamas with summer jackets. They began wearing European suits with trousers only in the early 1940s while the characteristic white turbans associated with East African Sikh males was to be worn by the next generation.

In letters to his son, Swaran, he would often express his longing for Kenya. He would constantly remember his Nairobi days, and how he missed it having spent the best years of his life there. He wrote a nostalgic poem about Nairobi sending it to Nahar Singh Māngat, QC, a life-long friend. Māngat acknowledged saying it was his best poem yet. On one occasion, almost desperate for return, he asked me to send for a tailor to make a suit of Italian woollen fabric he had bought earlier. Too weak to step out of the bed, he managed to stand for measurements with much effort. Looking back, it remains a sad recollection of my father in the last few months before death. There is some truth in the cliché – the home is where your heart is. He must have been torn between two homes; *des* – where he wanted to die like his predecessors, and *pardes* – where he had spent all productive years. By now he was old and frail. How he reconciled the two worlds in which he lived is difficult to speculate, but I have increasingly come to view emigration as a curse – to be cut off from one's roots, language and homeland.



**Nahar Singh Māngat and Gopal Singh Chandan.  
Nairobi. 1957**

Gopal Singh died in September 1969 in Nakodar from cancer. Knowing not just his physical suffering, but also his emotional condition had made me numb. During his brief period of illness, as I took him to over-crowded hospitals in Jalandhar, Ludhiana and Chandigarh, I slept on the floor while looking after him. My mother was around as a silent witness to our shared pain and suffering. As he passed away, I didn't grieve immediately after as I do now. My mother died seventeen years later in Chandigarh in good care of her daughter Amaro.

As a dutiful son, I ran the photographer studio for a couple of years after father's demise. In 1971, I abandoned his favourite vocation in which I had also acquired some expertise. I was then led to a trajectory abroad; I left Punjab for Germany in 1980 and then settled in London. Perhaps this was inevitable and inexplicable legacy of my father. Moreover, I was to become a writer of Punjabi – in a language for which I have developed special affection and almost a prayerful attitude. And in all this I was to carry his torch as it were.



## MEMOIRS\*

In March 1929, I was still in Nakodar when father started advising me about the sea passage. He would often say: 'In the boat you get fine flour, with it you should mix some *gheo* [refined butter]

before making the dough. This is good for your stomach. Keep old worn out clothes with you, wear and wash them daily and when you reach your destination throw them in the sea. Don't forget to keep a bottle of alcohol, drink daily as you will feel sick on the sea'. He kept giving me all sorts of advice. One day Bibi Prem [Kaur], daughter of Dr. Sundar Singh Puri of Nakodar Civil Hospital was present when father started another foray of advice. She joked with my father: 'Well *Bhai ji* [brother] you ask your son to drink, so what about us, the women?' I intervened: 'No, how can I drink? It is a sin and a teetotaler is as good as a woman!'

...

This was the first time, I was going away from my family. I felt very sad though I didn't show it. We made jokes all the way. I didn't know what the love for one's country meant, you know about it when you are away. We took a train and reached Bombay on 4<sup>th</sup> March 1929 and were met by travel agents, as all passengers from Punjab were to collect boat tickets. We were surprised that no travel agents greeted us with any cards. From newspaper reports, I knew that local Singh Sabha Gurdwara used to send *sewadars* – assistant-workers to the railway station to protect Sikh passengers from fraudulent travel agents. There was no Singh Sabha *sewadar* at the station to receive us. But we were determined to go to the Gurdwara. Women coolies helped us to carry our luggage and we went to the Singh Sabha Gurdwara and stood there homeless. A *sewadar* came and took us to a newly acquired building nearby and gave us a room for stay. The room had no electricity but had a water tap. He gave us a lantern which made noise like an engine and it went out itself. Such was the taste of Singh Sabha's services for Sikh passengers from Punjab and they charged us a lot. In the evening Rattan Singh, a life long friend from Nakodar and I sang a *shabad* in Basant *raag*: *Sadho mann ka maan tiyago* - get rid of false pride, oh the pious ones. I played the harmonium which I had manufactured with my own hands while Rattan Singh [of Nakodar] accompanied me on the tabla.

...

We made a hasty trip to Bombay zoo before buying our ration and utensils for the sea passage. We bought tinned milk, but realised much late that at least sixteen tins were required. But some felt just two would do, similarly we didn't buy enough soap or vegetables and nobody thought of buying any fruit. In fact, we were all a stingy lot and argued a lot among ourselves. After shopping we decided to have a walk around the *bandar* harbour as it was quite close to the market. First we saw a huge ship called [*SS*] *Rawalpindi*. We were astonished at its size and also scared how this would take us through hundreds of miles in the water. We were worried about seasickness. The closer we went to the sea the more our hearts sank. We returned to the room with no light. I had an American 5x7 camera with a tripod stand and a hat as well. As it had a light slide, I planned to buy a box of half size [glass] negative plates. A box of 12 negatives cost me three and a half rupees. I asked the shopkeeper to load a plate in the camera, as he tried to open the box in the dark room with me overlooking him, the plates slipped from his hand, fell on the floor with all plates shattered. Although the photographer gave me another box, I could not use the camera. This was a camera I had originally bought from Bhai Mansha Singh Boparai for ten Rupees.

On the next morning we were all ready for medical check-up. There were other passengers. The doctor asked us to take off our shirts and bare our chests. He pressed hard our bare chests with his fingers and put a stamp mark on our arms. All of us were declared fit. Walking by the shore, Gujjar Singh felt too scared to see such an ocean of water. He declared: 'I won't sail, and go back home by the next evening train'. I replied, 'If you say those words again, I'll push you right now in the sea!' Deep down, of course, I too was scared, but I pretended to laugh. I narrated him the legend how while dying one offers a cow to a Brahmin to ward off any hellish conditions of the *vaitarni* – the river in hell – one holds the tail of the cow. Look this is a big boat, we don't need to hold its tail, more over, we shall board it with our shoes on! Later I bought a trunk to keep the harmonium. For the port, we hired a *ghorha gaddi* horse-buggy. A *sewadar* from the Singh Sabha Gurdwara assisted us with necessary endorsements for our passports and he also paid the custom duty. Our *ghorha gaddi* stopped right in front of the ship. All passengers were sweating profusely under the corrugated iron-sheet roof. That discomfort was nothing compared to the fear of the unknown journey. Some

felt thirsty but there was no water facility, ironically as we called, ‘look we were standing by the sea full of water’. Then someone shouted: ‘Get your passports out’. Everyone complied. I was the first in the queue facing the gatekeeper who asked:

- Where are you going?
- To Nairobi, I said.
- On what job?
- *Tarkhana* Carpentry.
- For whom?
- For Phuman Singh and Tarlok Singh – furniture-makers.

He stamped my passport and soon all others were also cleared. I stepped on the gangplank and walked onto the ship as others followed. Our luggage was already deposited there. The moment we set foot on the ship, our fears disappeared and felt quite glad. As it was our maiden trip we didn’t know the right place for luggage or beddings. Coolies had placed our luggage at the lower deck. We saw big planks by the wall hanging with thick iron rods. Thinking beddings could fit in there, we made our beds there. In this room, majority were Kuchhi Gujarati women, and just four of us were men. It had a pipe on the ceiling for ventilation which brought fresh air. The lights were kept on for all day and night. Our boat *SS Allora* weighed 5,000 tonnes.



**Gopal Singh. 1929. Nairobi. Photo by Ram Singh of Nurmahal**

The ship departed, left the land at 4pm on March 6, 1929. My heart sank at the departing sight, but there was nothing to do. In our own country, there was not even enough bread to eat for everyone. As the ship blew its horn, it seemed to echo passengers’ heavy hearts. The gangplanks were lifted up, following other passengers; we also stood by the railing and started looking at Bombay’s receding landscape that was brimming with people only a moment ago. A tugboat started towing our ship from the shore, a motorcars’ bridge was lifted up and our huge ship started moving slowly. It gathered speed as it went into deeper waters. At last our darling ship started sailing as the sun was setting. In a few hours, Bombay disappeared completely from our sights and night set in.

The night seemed so young, as we were at the lower deck, we didn't know what to do during the night. None thought of preparing the food or even tea. Passing our time just looking at each other, we couldn't sleep. Gujarati women in the room, on the other hand were having fun. Other Punjabis were all on the upper deck. I was reminded of the Punjabi folksong: *Mulk mahi da vasda see koi ronda see koi hasda see* [it was a lovely place full of life, some crying and others rejoicing].

Many passengers got physically sick, others were about to throw up. We kept chatting till midnight before going to bed. At about three in the morning people starting taking shower at the water taps. The noise woke us up though we hadn't slept all that well. The waves hitting the ship had kept us awake and scared. Seeing others busy with their cooking we also lighted the fire in our *angeethee* brazier, cooked *dāl* lentils and *rotis*. After eating we chatted and passed time. One night all the Punjabi passengers, as usual, had gathered on the upper deck. One of them knew I had the harmonium, so they insisted I should play. Among our audience was Kartar Singh *thanedar* - the police officer.

...

After six days on the ship, I was feeling restless. I enquired from *khalasi* deckhand how long it will take to reach Mombasa. He informed me the ship is going first to Zanzibar to unload soap, onions and sugar. Soon, after twelve hours, the ship reached Zanzibar and poor workers arrived in the morning at 8am. They looked so black, had thick lips and their sight surprised and scared me a bit. Operating cranes, they unloaded the cargo onto large boats which were towed away by smaller ones.

As the night fell, we started dreaming about Mombasa where the ship anchored at its harbour at 6AM on 13 March 1929. A lascar lowered a thick rope in the sea with a weight attached to it to fathom the water and shouted to the pilot telling him the depth as there is always a risk in the shallow waters. At last the pilot from the Mombasa port arrived and scaled our ship with a rope ladder. He took control by the helm and parked the ship in the open docks. At that time the Mombasa port was under construction.

Many passengers had friends at the port to receive them, waving handkerchiefs and gesticulating whether they were all right. There was no body waiting for us and I felt like a calf lost in the herd. I was walking the deck aimlessly temporarily standing by the railing and watched what was happening. I just laughed seeing others laughing. Eventually, we queued up in front of a doctor who pressed and felt every one's stomach and handed over a paper slip to carry. Then at the immigration desk, our passports were checked and stamped with a card of two words 'TO LAND'. With our luggage we moved into a small boat leading us to the customs shed. Everyone opened cases while the clerk made a mark with chalk on all the items and cleared us.

Carrying our luggage, none of us knew where to go next. Hari Singh - the cushion maker from Morinda came to our rescue and suggested we should hire a motorcar. We decided to go to the Kalindini Gurdwara. Its building was made of timber in an old style ably built by the Punjabi *karigars* carpenters in 1898. The train reached roofed Nairobi railway station after a long zigzag journey. We weren't familiar with this place either. Makhan Singh of the Bhera area in Punjab used to ply luggage carriers. We gave him our address and he took us to Doaba Tailoring House. Grief and worries accompanied us. Our ship had brought the post from Bombay as there was no airmail then. Gujjar Singh received a letter on some other address, it announced: 'The day you left, your *mama ji* [paternal uncle, Gonda Singh Virdee from Shankar] had passed away in the morning'. Gonda Singh was a master craftsman of carpentry, my *ustaad* teacher during my training. I felt almost an orphan on hearing the news.

After some days I started working in Railway Headquarters.

## Makhan Singh



**Makhan Singh. Nairobi. August 1947**  
**Photo by Gopal Singh Chandan**

When I reached Kenya in 1929, the activity of Labour Trade Union of East Africa [LTUEA] was at its peak. There was a general strike in May which had lasted about four months. During this period Pandit Tara Singh, on the contractors' behalf, used to rail against the workers' demands to the congregation in the Gurdwara Bazar. As this gurdwara was under the control of Ramgarhia Board, one could argue that Ramgarhia Hall was raised out of the Gurdwara Bazar. The workers could not bear Ramgarhia interference and took over the gurdwara management. A parallel litigation against the old management proved unsuccessful, but the Ramgarhia Board lost control of the Gurdwara forever.

Before the strike, there were two rival organisations [of Ramgarhias] viz Ramgarhia Labour Union and Ramgarhia Artisans Union (RAU). Some radicals passed a resolution against RAU's Sohan Singh Rāgi. I started participating actively in the trade union, it included both Indian and African workers in its ranks. At this time Makhan Singh was Union's General Secretary, and a Gujarati, Baghji was its President. I became Makhan Singh's pal and accompanied him to all meetings in Nairobi and other towns. Other active members were Amar Singh Jalandhari and Hazara Singh, the electrician and amongst us, there was one misfit, Ujagar Singh Khushki.

...

Makhan Singh was eager for a trip to India. His request for leave was accepted at a Union meeting and I was elected assistant general secretary. He sailed for India on 24 April, 1940 and returned after seven years on 22 August 1947. During his absence, I carried out the official duties. However, I used to consider myself as illiterate. But on 13 June 1943, a public meeting took place at Patel Brotherhood Hall. The government was enacting legal requirement seeking workers' skills certified at the end of work-contract. The Union was opposing this move. I prepared my speech in Punjabi. Pritam Singh did a good job by translating it into English. Prabhu Bhai, Union President spoke in Gujarati while Kange adopted English. As the majority of audience was Punjabi-speakers, they looked restless. Pritam Singh suggested I should speak in Punjabi. I interrupted Kange and put

forward my arguments in Punjabi. Seven thousand workers listened to me attentively and I felt rewarded and confident.

...

Makhan Singh returned to Nairobi on 22 August 1947. After five days he was served with a notice to leave Kenya within a month. Chanan Singh, a Queen's Counsel filed an appeal against the order after the deadline had passed. The judge, a white man, ruled that the case was under the jurisdiction of the Governing Council, but told Chanan Singh privately that Makhan Singh shouldn't leave Kenya. The Appeal Court was to be held in Dara Salam. Chanan Singh was working on the appeal. D. N. Khanna expressed his wish to me to be in the defence team. As I told him Chanan Singh was fighting the case freely, we were pleased when Khanna also consented to charge no fees. Sudh Singh father of Makhan Singh booked a chartered plane to Dara Salam. Four of us flew and on the following day, appeal was rejected by 2-1 decision. Khanna filed an appeal in Nairobi heard by Mr. Thacker. The trial was almost a farce, a betrayal of justice. Khanna grilled the Immigration Officer and Police Commissioner during cross-examination. Nervous Immigration Officer asked for water and everyone in the court was laughing including the judge. The Police Commissioner also conceded that the action was deliberate.

I think it was October, 1948 when Makhan Singh phoned me that a CID officer, Mr. Poppey [?] had arrived to arrest him and his *Bhaiyaji* father was not there at the Punjab Press. He requested that after informing his father and Chanan Singh I should meet him. When I went to the Press, Makhan Singh took important papers out of his pocket and handed over to me. He told me that warrant for his arrest stated that he is being taken to Mombasa on 17:30 train leaving that afternoon and then was to be deported to India within two days. We all panicked and made frantic efforts to stop this order. We hastily drove to the prison and got Makhan's signed appeal against this deportation order and filed immediately before a special judge. The following morning Makhan was produced before the special court where a bail application was rejected on public security grounds. The Police was really well prepared this time. They had brought a lot of material from the CID in Punjab. Makhan Singh was a self-professed communist.

...

Comrade Makhan Singh was arrested on 15th May 1950 when I was in India. He was charged that he posed a grave threat to the state. Thousands of Africans turned up at Nairobi court to show solidarity with Makhan Singh. The government moved the case to Nayree while judge Mr. Thacker passed the case to the Governor who confirmed orders to detain Makhan Singh for an indefinite period. He was locked two hundred miles away from Nairobi where he was to remain a 'royal guest' for a long time.

### **Ghadr Kirti Activists in Kenya**

At that time I was known as G. S. Dukhia – my pen name, Dukhia means 'the wretched'. My poems had appeared in *Akali*, *Kirti Lehar*, *Kirpan Bahadur* and *Dukhi Kisan* under various pseudonyms of Sewak, Musafir, Kirti, Kamla Kirti, Dukhi Mazdoor, and Duhkiya African. Devinder Singh 'Katal'\*\* was secretary of Singh Sabha Gurdwara and I was member of its Executive Committee. Devinder hailed from Sansarpur near Jalandhar, and was too radical. He drafted a new constitution for Singh Sabha Gurdwara on Vaisakhi, 1930 and this was passed unanimously. Devinder Singh went to France [Russia] and returned soon then decided to go back to Punjab. He took a revolver with him smuggling it with some ammunition concealed within a round table top.

Ujagar Singh Kirti and I used to translate Hindi articles from *Hindi Mazdur* [The Indian Worker]. He would read out the original and I would then translate it simultaneously and the Punjabi version was then posted to *Dukhi Kisan* – a magazine published from Jalandhar during 1935-36. It was later banned. Devinder Singh read my articles and met me one day and asked if I can accompany him to Russia. I told him that as I had a large family to support, I couldn't go. Soon Ujagar Singh went to Moscow and Suba Singh followed him. At the time, I was working on a temporary job at Mombasa railway station as a carpenter. Both of them stayed with us. It was a secret and only I knew about

their mission. In France they were received by Rattan Singh, also known by another name as Ishar Singh.

Ujagar Singh Kirti became my friend from 1930 when he was a *granthi* at Gurdwara Bazar. Once, I shared a room with him, he was a very good man indeed. We became *pugg-vatt bhais* like brothers. We even shared our shoes as well! Probably in December 1935, he returned to his home village, Boparai Kalan, which is not far from my home town Nakodar. In 1932, Devinder Singh and myself anchored at Bombay received by Iqbal Singh Hundal at the port. He had arrived in an earlier boat. Teja Singh Sutantar was also there. I had met Hundal in Nairobi after his return from Moscow where he gave us some study lectures. I had also assisted him obtaining his new passport issued in Nairobi. We met in Bombay port, then all disappeared. After some time I met Devinder Singh in Punjab.



**Ujagar Singh. Nairobi. 1930. PHOTO BY UN PATEL**

Many comrades had argued that we should get armed training. Giani Gian Singh, Bishan Singh of Barha Pind, Devinder Singh, Wasdev Singh and myself used to drive out in the country every Sunday and practice revolver-shooting. Bishan Singh was a good *nishaanchi* marksman. I learnt shooting with a rifle and a hand revolver in no time and thought any good carpenter can be a good marksman. As many terrorists were arrested in Germany, our comrades became apprehensive. We had to throw away two big guns in the river meant to kill elephants. But as I was in-charge of ammunition supplied, I knew that it was concealed in the ceiling of Gurdwara Singh Sabha office. But sometimes later, I was forced to throw away ammunition worth hundreds of shillings into the sewer.



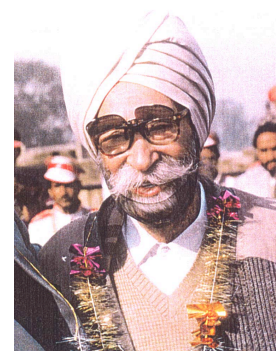
**Devinder Singh. c 1930**



**Suba Singh. c 1970**



**Wasdev Singh. 1932**



**Mota Singh. c 1970**

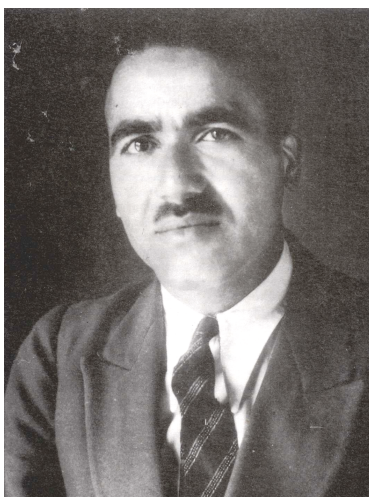
After my four years' stay in Punjab, I reached Nairobi on 13 October 1937. I was penniless and without shelter. I stayed at Wasdev Singh's place for a long time. Just four days after my arrival, Wasdev Singh sent me to Mombasa to fetch a comrade travelling from Moscow via France. At Mombasa railway station Hazara Singh, a Police Officer, bumped into me and asked, "Why are you in a rush, *Gyaniji*?" I said, "Well, I am collecting Wasdev Singh's overdue consignment." He said, "I know, do it with pleasure, no worries." A Martini Co. boat was to arrive on 20<sup>th</sup> October at eight in the morning. I bought a pass for two shillings. When I got on the boat, I found it was deserted. I started worrying and asked the purser in broken English where I could find Mr. Singh. He told me that Mr. Singh was taken by another boat for medical examination. As I searched, I didn't find him there either. I felt totally lost and it was Saturday. I searched all the hotels in Mombasa with no success. The next train to Nairobi was due the following day at 4pm. As I searched the train examining closely all passengers, finally I saw a man wearing an Italian hat looking very much an Italian. As our eyes met, he stood up. I left the rail compartment and hurriedly went aside to stand at the back of the crowd. The man came towards me, removing his hat, he asked, "Do you know Wasdev Singh?"

"You son of a pig!" I swore affectionately, "Where you have been? I've been running around like a headless chicken looking for you."

He told me, a taxi driver had taken him to an Arab hotel where he had a good rest. As we talked he told me his name was Harnam Singh alias Harmohinder Singh Sodhi. He narrated his experiences of Russia, Germany, France and other European countries. He enquired about the situation in Kenya and eventually we stayed at Wasdev Singh's place. As I was unemployed at the time, I went with Sodhi on long walks every day learning much about events from abroad, including such items as that there were seven Sanskrit teaching universities in Germany.

Sodhi sported a big heart and laughed contagiously. As Wasdev Singh kept contacts with all embassies, he arranged a visa for Sodhi to Goa which was a Portuguese territory. From there it was easy to enter India. Sodhi was adamant that whoever spoke against Bhai Gurmukh Singh and Gyani Teja Singh Sutantar was to be treated as an enemy.

## Udham Singh



**Udham Singh**  
Passport photo. 1933

Udham Singh, who was hanged to death in 1941 in London for assassinating Sir Michael O'Dwyer, worked in Lockett Moore Co. as a fitter in Nairobi.

## Ishar Das Episode

Ishar Das\*\*\*, a [Kenya Legislative] councillor was an arrogant man and caused much grief to the public. He kept an office on the top floor of Desai Memorial Hall. Wasdev Singh often shouted at Ishar Das during Congress meetings and on one occasion physically hit him. People were fed up with Das' behaviour and matters went further as some people wanted to murder him. However, we did not know what was simmering underneath, otherwise we could have saved the situation. The killers of Ishar Das acted on their own and quite spontaneously. Sometime in 1940 [November 1942], I can't remember the month, it was about 4 o'clock when Kavi Prem Singh, informed me that Ishar Das had been shot in his office. We came to know the assailants were: Bujha alias Balwant Singh of Katial, Saran Singh and Bakhshish Singh of Bhullewal. After murdering Ishar Das they fled in a car hired from an African, this was found abandoned in the jungle after three days. The driver was arrested and three of them returned to Nairobi. Saran Singh had fled to Mombasa, but could not catch a boat to India.

At the trial, Krishan Bhagwan Das' son who worked in Ishar Das' office as a clerk was the eye witness. His evidence in the court was conclusive. Bakhshish Singh was soon apprehended, while I sheltered Bujha in my house at Duke Street. He kept himself hidden under the floorboards. The entry to the hideout was through the dark room of the Studio. I served him food and drinks, but for three days, when we were campaigning for the election of our candidate SG Amin for the vacant seat left by Ishar Das, I could not care for him. When I returned to my house, Bujha saw the police was in the vicinity. He wanted to move out lest I be harmed. He carried two pistols, I asked him to disarm himself especially to get rid of the one used in the murder. He was adamant, he did not care about my advice and said, 'I will prefer to die carrying my guns'. The other fellow, Puran Singh, of Katial who knew Bujha, boasted in a restaurant: 'Look at Bujha who lived off begging *lassi* has turned such a brave man.' An investigation officer present there took the clue from this loose talk and this led to Bujha's arrest. He was found asleep and drunk in the bushes.\*\*\*\*

## Notes on Memoirs

\*As noted in the introduction, my father's original memoirs were lost, pages that survived were donated to Desh Bhagat Yadgar Library, Jalandhar. This is the English translation of the original in Punjabi.

\*\* Devinder Singh was arrested in 1932 on his return to Punjab and was later killed allegedly due to his betrayal of the Party. Devinder Singh was by then 'an alcoholic and a recluse' and murdered in 1937 by his Kirti Party. No police case was filed for Devinder Singh's murder. The allegation was that he acted as an informer to police leading to the arrest of a Babbar Akali Kartar Singh, Chak Baghrian, Nakodar – a proclaimed offender. Kartar Singh was charged for the murder of a police informer who had betrayed five Babbar Akalis in 1937. Kartar Singh was hanged to death in Jalandhar jail on 10 August 1938. The murder came as the friction between the Kirtis and the official Communist Party of India (CPI) escalated and lasted till July 1941 when Kirtis merged with the latter. Devinder Singh belonged to the pro-CPI Iqbal Singh Hundal faction of the Ghadr-Kirti Party. One version, held by Harkishan Singh Surjit, the then Punjab CPI leader is that Devinder Singh was not an informer but a victim of 'Sutantar clique'. Sardara Singh (d 2004 in Moscow) belonged to the Hundal group. Bhagat Singh Bilga, a veteran Ghadr-Kirti leader confirmed that Devinder Singh belonged to the Hundal faction of the Kirti Party and he 'either died an alcoholic or was killed by the Kirtis'. Rift within the Kirti Party had started in Moscow as confirmed by Sardara Singh, a veteran Kirti who stayed back in Moscow since 1935. He has stated in a recorded interview with me in Moscow in September 1989 that when he was at the University of the Toilers of the East, the Hundal faction had 13 members while the Sutantar group commanded support of 19 members.

\*\*\* During the war years, Ishar Das was appointed as Deputy Director of the Indian Manpower Commission and became responsible for the recruitment of Asian clerks and artisans controlling Asian emigration. His new role led to his complete alienation from his own community and resulted

in his murder by three Sikhs in November 1942. My father confided to me on his deathbed that in fact Wasdev Singh had masterminded the murder. The British intelligence saw Das as the conduit of Russian funds for the Kirti-Ghadarites and it is a fair conjecture that there could have been some dispute over the control of money apart from their double dealings with the Germans on one hand and with the Russians on the other. (For details see Appendix on Devinder Singh Katal; and *Communism in Punjab*. Gurharpal Singh. Ajanta. 1994).

\*\*\*\* Bujha and his accomplices were all *tarkhans* [artisans-carpenters]. Puran Singh was probably a *Jat* cultivator. Asking neighbours for *lassi* in Punjab meant someone too poor to afford a buffalo or cow for milk. Bujha and Bakhshish were hanged to death while Saran Singh being a minor was spared. He returned to his Punjab village after the verdict.

Balwant Rai alias Bujha was born at village Dadiyal, Hoshiarpur in about 1917. He was the only son of his parents Mrs and Mr Dhanna Ram. Harbakhsh alias Bakhshish Singh was born in village Bhullewal, Hoshiarpur in 1928. His father, Dharam Singh Ryat, was the president of Ramgarhia Artisans' Union, Nairobi. Saran Singh was also born in village Bhullewal, Hoshiarpur in 1918. His father Chattar Singh was a near relative of Dharam Singh Ryat, who brought him to East Africa.

## A POEM BY GOPAL SINGH CHANDAN

### ਜਿੰਦ ਡਾਢੀ ਕੁੜਿੱਕੀ ਚ ਆਈ ਹੋਈ ਏ

॥ ਗੋਪਾਲ ਸਿੰਘ ਨੇ ਇਹ ਕਵਿਤਾ ਮੁਣਸ਼ੀ ਅਹਮਦ ਦੀਨ ਦੀ ਪ੍ਰਧਾਨਗੀ ਚ 13 ਮਈ 1935 ਨੂੰ ਚੀਮੇ ਪਿੰਡ ਚ ਹੋਈ ਕਿਸਾਨ ਕਾਨਫਰੰਸ ਵਿਚ ਪੜ੍ਹੀ ਸੀ ॥

ਇਕ ਜਿੰਦ ਮੇਰੀ ਟੰਟੇ ਸੈਂਕੜੇ ਨੇ, ਕੈਸੀ ਜਾਨ ਦੁੱਖਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਫਸੀ ਹੋਈ ਏ।  
ਗਲਾ ਘੁਟਦਾ ਪਿਆ ਜੱਲਾਦ ਮੇਰਾ ਤੇ ਸੱਯਾਦ ਕਮਾਨ ਵੀ ਕੱਸੀ ਹੋਈ ਏ।  
ਜੇਕਰ ਬੋਲਦਾ ਹਾਂ ਅਪਣੇ ਹਾਲ ਉੱਤੇ, ਹੱਥੋਂ ਕਾਲੇ ਕਾਨੂੰਨਾਂ ਬੇਬਸੀ ਹੋਈ ਏ।  
ਕੈਦ, ਜੇਲ, ਫਾਂਸੀ, ਕਾਲੇ ਪਾਣੀਆਂ ਦੀ, ਮੱਤ ਮੇਰੀ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਨੇ ਖੱਸੀ ਹੋਈ ਏ।  
ਜਿੰਨੇ ਜੁਲਮ ਸਿਰ 'ਤੇ ਓਨੇ ਵਾਲ ਵੀ ਨਹੀਂ, ਦੇਖ-ਦੇਖ ਕੇ ਅਕਲ ਚਕਰਾਈ ਹੋਈ ਏ।  
ਕੌਣ ਸੁਣੇ ਫਰਿਆਦ ਦਿਲਦਾਰ ਮੇਰੀ, ਜਿੰਦ ਡਾਢੀ ਕੁੜਿੱਕੀ ਵਿਚ ਆਈ ਹੋਈ ਏ।

ਲੱਖਾਂ ਮਣਾਂ ਅਨਾਜ ਮੈਂ ਕਰਾਂ ਪੈਦਾ, ਫਿਰ ਵੀ ਬਾਲ ਤਰਸਣ ਭੁੱਜੇ ਦਾਣਿਆਂ ਨੂੰ।  
ਦੁਖੀ ਰਾਤ ਦਿਨੇ ਖਪ-ਖਪ ਪਏ ਮਰਦੇ, ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਦੇਖੀਏ ਜਾ ਭੁੱਖਣ-ਭਾਣਿਆਂ ਨੂੰ।  
ਕਿਰਤੀ ਜੁੱਲੀ, ਕੁੱਲੀ ਤਾਈਂ ਤਰਸਦੇ ਨੇ, ਧਨੀ ਲੱਤ ਮਾਰੇ ਛੱਤੀ ਖਾਣਿਆਂ ਨੂੰ।  
ਪੈਦਾ ਸਾਡੀ 'ਤੇ ਧਨੀ ਬਹਾਰ ਲੁੱਟਣ, ਦੁਖੀ ਦੇਖੀਏ ਅਸੀਂ ਨਿਆਣਿਆਂ ਨੂੰ।  
ਕਿਧਰੇ ਟੈਕਸਾਂ ਨੇ ਟਕਾ ਮੁੱਲ ਪਾਇਆ, ਕਿਧਰੇ ਮਾਲੀਏ ਰੱਤ ਸੁਕਾਈ ਹੋਈ ਏ।  
ਏਸੇ ਲਈ ਮੁੜ-ਮੁੜ ਪਿਆ ਆਖਦਾ ਹਾਂ - ਜਿੰਦ ਡਾਢੀ ਕੁੜਿੱਕੀ ਵਿਚ ਆਈ ਹੋਈ ਏ।

ਮੇਰੇ ਨਾਲ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਦਾ ਪਿਆਰ ਡਾਢਾ, ਜ਼ਿੰਮੇਵਾਰ ਮੇਰੀ ਇੱਜ਼ਤ ਮਾਣ ਦੀ ਏ।  
ਮਤਾਂ ਉਡ ਨਾ ਜਾਵਾਂ ਆਕਾਸ਼ ਉੱਤੇ, ਤਾਈਓਂ ਜਾਲ ਗੁਲਾਮੀ ਦਾ ਤਾਣਦੀ ਏ।  
ਭਾਈਆਂ ਨਾਲ ਮਿਲ ਕੇ ਬਹਿਣ ਨਹੀਂ ਦਿੰਦੀ, ਮੇਰੇ ਦਿਲ ਦੀ ਰਮਜ਼ ਪਛਾਣਦੀ ਏ।  
ਜੇਲ ਡੱਕਣਾ ਤਾਈਓਂ ਪਸੰਦ ਕਰਦੀ, ਜ਼ਿੰਮੇਵਾਰ ਜੋ ਮੇਰੇ ਮਕਾਨ ਦੀ ਏ।  
ਏਨੀਆਂ ਖੂਬੀਆਂ ਦੇ ਹੁੰਦੇ-ਸੁੰਦਿਆਂ ਵੀ, ਜਾਨ ਫੇਰ ਕਿਉਂ ਭਲਾ ਘਬਰਾਈ ਹੋਈ ਏ?  
ਉੱਤੇ ਰਾਤ ਪਈ ਕੋਈ ਨਾ ਰਾਹ ਦੀਹਦਾ, ਜਿੰਦ ਡਾਢੀ ਕੁੜਿੱਕੀ ਵਿਚ ਆਈ ਹੋਈ ਏ।

ਜੇਕਰ ਭੁੱਲ ਕੇ ਵੀ ਬਾਹਰ ਪੈਰ ਪਾਵਾਂ, ਮੇਰੀ ਰੱਖਿਆ ਲਈ ਸੇਵਾਦਾਰ ਦਿੰਦੀ।  
ਸੇਵਾ ਦੇਸ ਲਈ ਕੱਟਾਂ ਅਨੀਂਦਰਾ ਜੇ, ਝਟ ਪਕੜ ਸੁਲਾ ਉੱਤੇ ਦਾਰ ਦਿੰਦੀ।  
ਮੂੰਹੋਂ ਰੋਣ ਦੀ ਜੇਕਰ ਆਵਾਜ਼ ਕੱਢਾਂ, ਬੈਂਤਾਂ ਨਾਲ ਫਿਰ ਸੁਹਣਾ ਪਿਆਰ ਦਿੰਦੀ।

ਫਿਰਦਾ ਬੋਲਦਾ ਬੈਠਾ ਜੇ ਥੱਕ ਜਾਵਾਂ, ਕੋਹਲੂ, ਜੇਲ ਚੱਕੀ 'ਤੇ ਖਲੁਾਰ ਦਿੰਦੀ।  
ਚਾਰੇ ਪਾਸਿਓਂ ਤੋਂ ਐਸਾ ਜਕੜਿਆਂ ਹਾਂ, ਕੋਈ ਅਜਬ ਈ ਖੇਲ ਬਣਾਈ ਹੋਈ ਏ।  
ਦਸੇ ਅਜੇ ਵੀ ਆਖਾਂ ਨਾ ਕੀ ਆਖਾਂ? ਜਿੰਦ ਡਾਢੀ ਕੁੜਿੱਕੀ ਵਿਚ ਆਈ ਹੋਈ ਏ।

ਆਓ ਕਿਰਤੀਓਂ ਹੋ ਕੇ ਸਭ ਕੱਠੇ, ਗਲੋਂ ਫਾਹਾ ਗੁਲਾਮੀ ਦਾ ਲਾਹ ਦਈਏ।  
ਰਾਜ ਕਿਰਤੀ ਕਿਸਾਨਾਂ ਦਾ ਕੈਮ ਕਰਕੇ, ਪੂੰਜੀਦਾਰੀ ਦਾ ਫਸਤਾ ਮੁਕਾ ਦੇਈਏ।  
ਕੋਈ ਧਨੀ ਗਰੀਬ ਨਾ ਨਜ਼ਰ ਆਵੇ, ਸਾਂਝੀਵਾਲਤਾ ਜਗ ਵਰਤਾ ਦੇਈਏ।  
ਅੱਜ ਦੁਖੀ ਜਿਹੜੇ ਸਾਰੇ ਸੁਖੀ ਹੋਈਏ ਝੰਡਾ ਏਕਤਾ ਜੱਗ ਝੁਲਾ ਦੇਈਏ।  
ਕੱਠੇ ਹੋ ਕੇ ਸਾਰੇ ਫਿਰ ਗਾਵੀਏ ਇਹ, ਜਿਹੜੀ ਦੁਖੀਆਂ ਲਹਿਰ ਚਲਾਈ ਹੋਈ ਏ।  
ਅਸੀਂ ਹੱਸੀਏ ਤੇ ਧਨੀ ਕਹਿਣ ਅੱਗੋਂ - ਜਿੰਦ ਡਾਢੀ ਕੁੜਿੱਕੀ ਵਿਚ ਆਈ ਹੋਈ ਏ।।

## Appendix

### GHADR-KIRTI CONNECTIONS WITH KENYA

[The following entries are taken from the Government of India Intelligence Report: *The Ghadr Directory 1934*, Addenda and corrigenda up to the 1<sup>st</sup> March, 1937; Government of India, New Delhi, India Office Collection, British Library, File No. L/PJ/12/284].

**D-18. Devinder Singh 'Katal'**, alias Teja Singh, son of Thakur Singh, Village Sansarpur, District Jullundur. Is a matriculate. He is believed to have sympathised with the Akalis during the Akali movement though he posed as a helper of the Government. On 27<sup>th</sup> February 1926 he was granted passport No. 20054 for Kenya Colony by the Punjab Government. In 1928 he was working as Honorary Secretary of the Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Nairobi, East Africa. In 1931 he was employed as a clerk in Barclay's Bank Nairobi. Was said to have a great following there and to be a great agitator and a rank communist. Was said to have receiving financial help from Moscow through Ishar Das for his Communist propaganda in the Colony. About the latter half of 1931 he wrote a letter to Bhag Singh Canadian (B-47) requesting that copies of the "Mazdoor Kisan" might be sent to some 20 addresses in Kenya Colony. He further stated that he had organised a Kirti Party in Kenya and asked for a letter of introduction to assist those of its members whom he hoped to send to Moscow for training. He also contributed an article to the "Hindustan Ghadr" for February 1932 in which he exhorted the youths to strive hard to free their country. Was issued with Kenya Passport No. A.-18994 valid for the British Empire and endorsed for Panama on 13<sup>th</sup> January 1930, in applying for he had stated that his previous passport had been lost. Was last heard of in Zanzibar in January 1932. Description: Age between 25/30 years; height 5'-9"; left thumb missing; fair complexion; medium build; photo on record. There are a number of letters which show that he is highly thought of by the members of the Ghadr Party and especially by Teja Singh Sutantar (T-8), and Joga Singh (J-31). Secretary of the Ghadr Party. The former met him several times in Detroit and the latter tried to secure for him a job in Ram Singh's (R-21) store at Marysville. He is regarded as one of the most active members of the party.

**S-82. Suba Singh\***, alias Kato, son of Vir Singh, Village Thatian Mahanto[a]n, P.S. Sirhali, District AMRITSAR. While working as a mechanic in the Nairobi Electrical Company (Kenya) in 1932 was selected for revolutionary training in Russia. Arrived in Moscow in November of that year, travelling from Berlin in the company of Rattan Singh (R-36), at whose request he had been recruited. Was still in Russia in 1934, but seems to have left in the summer of 1935. Unheard of since. Description. Born 15th February 1893; height 5' 8"; medium build; sallow complexion; cut on forehead; clean shaven; pock-pitted face; hair turning grey; knows a little English; dresses in European style. Photograph (1932) on record. Travel Document. Nairobi passport A. 21423, dated 18<sup>th</sup> March 1932.

**U-12. Ujagar Singh\*\***, alias Maroj, son of Nagina Singh, Village Boparae, P. S. Nakodar, District JULLUNDUR. Joined the Akali agitation in India in 1924. Left for Mombasa in August or September 1929. Worked for some time as a mason in Nairobi, then became a salaried priest in a

gurdwara there. Visited his home in October 1930 but was again working as a mason and painter in Nairobi in February 1931. In response to an appeal from Rattan Singh (R-36), left for revolutionary training in Russia in November 1932 as a nominee of the Ghadr Party, Kenya. Returned to Nairobi in December 1934 and to India in November 1935. Arrested in the Punjab in December 1935 and released in January 1936. Is under surveillance in his village. Description. – Born 1904; height 5’ 8””; stout; wheat complexion; soar on left forefinger; clean shaven; knows Gurmukhi only. Photograph on record. Travel Documents: Nairobi passport A 21538, dated 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1932.

**W-10. Wasdev Singh\*\*\***, son of Gopal Singh, Village Rane Bhatti, District SHEIKHUPURA. A watchmaker in Nairobi. Has for a long time been acting as an accommodation address for the Ghadr Party in British East Africa. Early in 1933 his address was found in the address book of Malcolm Ivan Nurse, alias George Padmore, Chairman of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers. One of the founders and President of the Labour Trade Union, Nairobi a Communist-Ghadr organization. Address P.O. Box 300, Nairobi.

\*Suba Singh died in circa 1970 in his native village. Before sailing for Kenya he spent a year and seven months in Punjab jail for his Ghadr Party activities. He returned from Moscow in 1935 becoming an activist of Kirti Party along with his wife Sant Kaur. They both were members of the Punjab CPI till their death.

\*\* Ujagar Singh passed away in 1970 in Southall, West London. He migrated to UK in 1959 on a Punjabi Muslim’s passport and earned living as a bakery worker. During 1939-41, he was district secretary of Jalandhar branch of CPI. He belonged to the Hundal faction of the Ghadr-Kirti Party. His uncle, Basant Singh, after his return from Singapore, was jailed for seven years as a Ghadrite.

\*\*\* Wasdev Singh died in London on 11 February 1991. He was born in Dalhousie, Punjab in 1904.



## GLOSSARY

Adda	Meeting place; joint
<i>Akali</i>	Sikh newspaper started in 1926
Amrit-dhari	A baptised Sikh
Angeethee	Brazier
Bania	Hindu trader caste
Barat	Members of Wedding Party or procession
Bhai	Brother, used as a prefix for Ghadrīs –Kirtīs
Bhaiyaji	Father
<i>Bharat Sewak</i>	Journal published by Bharat Sewak Samaj and edited by Balbir Singh Sandhu during the late 1960s
Chadar	Bed sheet
Chaunkian	Procession
Dal	Lentil
Dalit	Lit. Oppressed; belonging to a lowest caste
<i>Dastavez</i>	Trend setter underground Punjabi literary magazine edited by Amarjit Chandan from 1969-1972
Desh Bhagat	Patriot
<i>Desh Bhagat Yadan</i>	Monthly magazine published by Desh Bhagat Yadgar, Jalandhar during 1960-1970
Dera	Encampment
Des/Pardes	Homeland/ Foreign country
Duree	Bed carpet
<i>Ghadr</i>	Organ of the Ghadr Party
Gheo	Refined butter
Gurmukh	Literally someone whose face is turned towards the Guru; a faithful follower
Gurpurab	Anniversaries of significant events associated with Sikh Gurus
Gutka	Pocket size hymn book with selections from the <i>Adi Granth</i>
Gyaniiji	Learned Sikh gentleman

<i>Jeevan</i>	A literary monthly from Bombay edited by Bishan Singh Upashak and Sukhbir until 1960
Ilaqa	Area; district; territory
<i>Japuji</i>	A composition of Guru Nanak that is recited by Sikhs every morning. This is the most commonly known Sikh liturgical prayer
Jat	Landowning cultivator caste
Kafi	A Middle Eastern or Sufi lyrical poetry
Kangha	A small wooden comb, one of 5Ks, worn by Sikhs
Karha	Steel bracet, one of the Five Ks
Karigars	Craftsmen
Kavi/Kavi Darbar	Poet/ Poets' gathering
Khalasi	Deckhand
Kirpan	Sword, one of the Five Ks
<i>Kirti</i>	Organ of the Kirti Party started by Bhai Santokh Singh (1892-1927) from Amritsar in 1926
<i>Kirti Lehar</i>	Kirti Party magazine from Meerut in the mid-1930s
Kurta pajama	Pyjamas
<i>Lal Dhandora</i>	Kirti Party underground paper published during the 1930s
Lassi	Yoghurt drink
Mamaji	Paternal uncle
Mandir	Hindu temple
Munshi	Clerk
Misl	A Sikh confederacy of the 18 <sup>th</sup> century
Maqām	Sufi or Muslim place of worship
Mohalla	Neighbourhood / Street
<i>Nawan Zamana</i>	A Communist Punjabi daily from Jalandhar since 1952
Panda	A Brahmin keeping records of genealogy at Haridwar and Pehowa
Pauri	A stanza from <i>Japuji</i> – Guru Nanak's popular composition.
Pugg-vatt bhai	Close friends; lit. who have exchanged turbans
<i>Preet Lari</i>	Punjabi literary monthly established in 1932
<i>Punjabi Duniya</i>	Punjabi literary monthly published from Patiala
Qissa	A long narrative poem in Punjabi / Urdu folklore tradition
Sikhi sarup	A male Sikh appearance wearing turban and beard
Raag	Indian classical musical composition
Roti	Chapati
Shabad	Hymns in the <i>Adi Granth</i> based on classical <i>raag</i> s musical compositions
Taal	Shop
Tarkhan	Carpenter
Tarkhana	Carpentry
Tehsil	Sub-division of a district
Thanedar	Police inspector
Trah misra	Refrain in a poetical composition
Udasi Dera	An Udasi controlled <i>gurdwara</i> or <i>dharamsala</i> , the Udasi sect follows Sri Chand, a son of Guru Nanak.
Ustād	Maestro, teacher, coach
Vaitarni	River in hell

## About the author



AMARJIT CHANDAN, the youngest son of Gopal Singh Chandan and author of this booklet, was born in Nairobi in 1946. After graduating from Panjab University in 1967, he joined the Maoist Naxalite movement and edited its literary and political journals. He spent two years in prison in solitary confinement. Later he worked for various Punjabi magazines, including the Bombay-based *Economic & Political Weekly* before migrating to Germany in 1980. Now he lives and works in London with his radio broadcaster wife and two sons.

He has published six collections of poetry and two books of essays in Punjabi notably *Jarban* (poems) and *Phailsufian* and *Nishani* (essays). He has edited and translated about 30 anthologies of Indian and world poetry and fiction by, among others, Brecht, Neruda, Ritsos, Hikmet, Cardenal and John Berger in Punjabi. English versions of his poems have appeared in England in a chapbook *Being Here* (1993, 1995, 2005) and the magazines the *Poetry Review*, *Artrage*, *Bazaar*, *Critical Quarterly*, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, *Papirus* (Turkey), *Erismus*, *Ombrela* and *Odos Panos* (Greece) and *Lettre Internationale* (Romania).

In 2004, Bhasha Vibhag, Govt of Punjab, gave him Rs 1 lakh life-time achievement award for his contribution to Punjabi poetry and prose.

