Radical Politics in Colonial Punjab

Governance and sedition

Shalini Sharma

Routledge Studies in South Asian History

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The radical left in the Punjab in pre-independence India was opposed to the Quit India campaign, a position which was widely vilified. As a result, its actions during the 1920s and 1930s have often been viewed as foreign and quintessentially un-Indian. This book examines some of these deterministic misapprehensions and establishes that, in fact, Punjabi communism was inextricably woven into the local culture and traditions of the region. By focusing on the political history of the organised left, a considerable and growing force in South Asia, it discusses the formation and activities of radical groups in the colonial Punjab and offers valuable insights as to why some of these groups did not participate in the Congress movement during the run-up to independence. Furthermore, it traces the impact of the colonial state's institutions and policies upon these radical groups and sheds light on how and when the left, though committed to revolutionary action, found itself obliged to assimilate within the new framework devised by the colonial state.

Based on a thorough investigation of primary sources in India and the UK with special emphasis upon the language used by the revolutionaries of this period, this book will be of great interest to academics in the field of political history, language and the political culture of colonialism, as well as those working on Empire and South Asian studies.

Shalini Sharma is Lecturer in Colonial and Post-colonial History at Keele University, UK. Her research interests focus on the political histories of marginal groups and their interaction with political structures.

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2010
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
270 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10016

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2010.

To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or Routledge's collection of thousands of eBooks please go to www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk.

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Sharma, Shalini, 1971–
Radical politics in colonial punjab: governanace and sedition/Shalini Sharma.
p. cm.–(Routledge studies in South Asian History; 6)
"Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada"–T.p. verso
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Communism–India–Punjab–History–20th century.–2. Radicalism–India–Punjab–History–20th century. 3. Radicals–India–Punjab–History–20th century. 4. Right and left (Political science)–History–20th century. 5. Sedition–India–Punjab–History–20th century. 6. Religion and politics–India–Punjab–History–20th century. 7. Punjab (India)–Politics and government–20th century. 8. Punjab (India)–Colonial influence. 9. Great Britain–Colonies–Administration–History–20th century I. Title.
HX395.P8S54 2010
320.53'209545509041–dc22
2009012473

ISBN 0-203-86969-9 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN13: 978–0–415–45688–3 (hbk)
ISBN13: 978–0–203–86969–7 (ebk)

ISBN10: 0–415–45688–6 (hbk)
ISBN10: 0–203–86969–9 (ebk)

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Crawling punishment, Amritsar. An English woman was attacked on this street. As a deterrent, Indians had to crawl on it (unknown photographer, 1919). © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved. Photo 566/(4), India Office Select Materials.

Acknowledgements

In this book I have tried to understand some aspects of the radical politics of the left in a significant but neglected province of British India, the Punjab. I would not have considered attempting to satisfy my curiosity about the Indian left without the encouragement of my teachers: Mary Bainbridge, the late Bryan Symons, Terry and Barbara Bell, Samita Sen, Sebastien Budgen, the late Gerard Duveen and the late Chandrashekar Prasad.

The book is based on the PhD thesis I completed in 2005 at the School of Oriental and African Studies. I am indebted to my supervisor, Sudipta Kaviraj. He provided me with insights and encouragement during my doctoral research. Joya Chatterji's encouragement and advice were tremendously helpful. The thesis developed from an initial interest in the Indian left, which was encouraged by Samita Sen at Cambridge. I thank her for introducing me to Jawaharlal Nehru University. In the early stages of my thesis I was fortunate to be advised by Javeed Alam, David Taylor, John Sidel, Gurharpal Singh, Sanjay Seth, Pritam Singh, Bhagwan Josh and Bishnu Mohapatra and members of the Punjab Research Group, who helped me to formulate questions and my focus.

I have benefited from a number of conversations, discussions and even arguments with friends throughout the years. At London these took place with Peggy Froerer, Suhit Sen, Daud Ali, Sundari Anitha, John Game, Manjari Katju, Bhavna Krishnamurty, Rochelle Pinto and Benjamin Zachariah; in Delhi, Maheshwar Singh, Amitabh Behar, Richa Singh, Mohinder Singh, Anoop Sukuraman, Mahesh Daga, Nandini Bhattacharya, Pratik Chakrabarti and Ashley Tellis; and in Oxford, Samira Sheikh, Rochana Bajpai, Prashant Kidambi, Kaushik Bhaumik, Debraj Bhattacharya and Rajarshi Das Gupta. I have also received advice from Amalendu Misra, Peter Alexander, Katherine Adeney and Andrew Wyatt.

The staff at the Teen Murti Memorial Museum and Library, Delhi; the National Archives of India, Delhi; the University Library, Cambridge; the Centre of South Asian Studies, Cambridge; the Desh Bhagat Yaadgar Museum and Library, Jullunder; the Warwick University Modern Records Centre, Warwick University; the Archives of Contemporary History, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi; The Communist Party of India Library at Ajoy Bhavan, Delhi; and the Oriental and India Office Collection at The British Library, London, have been invaluably helpful.

Jaswinder Phul and Shafiqur Rehman Khan have provided much needed practical support and Riaz Ahmed, Mubarak Ali, Mir Wajahat Ullah, Farooq Tariq, Harish Puri, Dr P. C. Dhanda, Darshan Singh, Tej Purewal, Virinder Kalra, Pippa Virdee and Richa Singh generously helped me in Jullunder, Lahore, Karachi, Amritsar and Delhi.

I am grateful for the opportunity given to me by the Department of International History at the London School of Economics to complete my thesis as a Tutorial Fellow. My special thanks go to Joya Chatterji, Anil Seal, David Stevenson, Timothy Hochstrasser, Antony Best, Murad Banaji, Jeffrey Byrne and David Grummitt during this period. The thesis would not have been completed without the constant proofreading that Samira Sheikh provided whenever I asked. Support given by Jonathan Hull, Kristal Davidson, Gita Amin, Sarah Butler and Maneesh Sharma helped me finally finish the thesis. I completed the book at Keele University. I thank my colleagues and friends and former students, particularly Ian Atherton, Rochana Bajpai, Amitabh Behar, Barbara, Brendan and Terry Bell, Sebastian Budgen, Sarah Butler, Ilyas Chattha, Joya Chatterji, Malcolm Crooke, Kate Cushing, Erika Degani, Christophe and Heike Deikmann, Amrit Dhaliwal, Mark Galeotti, John Game, Natasha Grayson, Zoe Groves, Timothy Hochstrasser, Ann Hughes, Peter Jackson, Meena and Mudit Jindal, Rajiv Kapoor, Saba Khan, Prashant Kidambi, Miles Larmer, Gabrielle Lynch, Rob Maisy, Fenn Maisy-Monks, Chandra Mallampalli, David Maxwell, Kirsten Monks, Philip Morgan, Ajay Muddimal, Rajesh and Reena Pahuja, Helen Parr, Savitha Piercy, Stuart Reeve, Samita Sen, Samira Sheikh, Richa Singh, Margaret Small, Tony K. Stewart, Robin and Angela Studd, David Thurkettle, Charles and Kate Townshend, Emma Waterton, Benjamin Zachariah and especially Simon Boughey for helping me actually enjoy the time spent writing my book.

The book was read and reread and reread by Anil Seal, Joya Chatterji, Samira Sheikh and Simon Boughey. I am indebted to them for their tireless patience and constant support.

I also thank Dorothea Schaefter at Routledge, and Evelyn Wilkins and Andrew Davidson at Prepress Projects for their interest and help in publishing the book.

Finally I could not have even begun this project without the support and love of my dear parents, Raj and Sharda Sharma, and my family: Sunil, Jhuma, Maneesh, Sameen, Satish, Reeta, Geeta, Saurav, Vijay, Sanjeevan, Vinay, Navita, Rachna, Sumit, Shiv, Vikas, Ritu, Yogesh, Renu, Parvesh, Pranav, Lata, Narender, Sushi, Anshuman, Jai, Deepak, Mona, Manju and Puran Sharma, Santosh and K. K. Salwan and Kamal Malhotra. Manu especially has helped during the many computer crisis points that accompanied writing. I do not have enough words to express my love and thanks to my family.

Glossary

Atta – wheat flour
Baba – respected person
Babu – clerk
Badmaash – bad character
Biradari – brotherhood
Dacoit – armed robber
Desh – land/nation
Ferungi – foreigner
Guru – teacher
Hartal – strike
Hooqa – smoking pipe
Ilaqa – locale
Izzat – pride/respect
Karma – action
Kazi – the legislative representative of the Mughal court
Kisan – peasant
Kissas – stories
Kirti – worker
Lambardar – one of the village headmen who pays land revenue on behalf of small proprietors
Mahant – chief priest
Mazdoor – worker
Mohala – suburb
Muqaddam – one who keeps law and order
Nizam – local leader
Panchayat – village councils
Panth – order
Parcharaks – preachers
Parchar – preach
Patwari – revenue account keeper
Pir – sufi master
Purdah – veil

Sabha – meeting; group
Sant – ascetic
Satyagraha – militant non-violence
Sheikh – religious leader
Shrenijang – class struggle
Vedanta – system of Hindu philosophy founded on the Upanishads of the Vedas
Yogi – ascetic, especially nath Shaivite
Zaildar – a subordinate official
Zamindar – landowner

Introduction

In 1929, a young revolutionary from the Punjab fell in love and decided to get married. This seemingly innocent event led to a bitter debate among those who led the revolutionary group to which he belonged, as its members had taken a vow of celibacy in the national cause. One of the more drastic solutions proposed was that the young romantic be executed. However, the assassin picked for the job was an informer in the pay of the British. Since he considered murder not to be part of his job description, he confessed his predicament to the intended victim, who, somehow, persuaded his comrades not to mete out such a draconian punishment. Eventually, he did get married . . . in the safe confines of a Lahore jail.[1]

The young revolutionary in question, Yashpal, went on to write a number of novels in Hindi, and Chandrashekar Azad, the man who had ordered his execution, two years later in 1931 took his own life when surrounded by armed police. Both belonged to the Naujawan Bharat Sabha, an organisation which brought together many of the complex strands in the political, radical and revolutionary left in the Punjab, movements which lost impetus when their main and iconic leader, Bhagat Singh, aged only 23, was hanged on 31 March 1931 for throwing a bomb into the Punjab's Legislative Assembly.

This book traces the history of the 'organised' left in the Punjab. It argues that it cannot be analysed without understanding the inwardness of Yashpal's predicament on the one hand, with martyrdom and sacrifice seen as weapons in the political struggle, and on the other the eternal vigilance which the British Raj was obliged to maintain against what it saw as an extremist threat to its very existence. Moreover, the Punjab has a distinct martial culture and traditions. Effective political action was frequently associated with 'masculinity', giving a peculiarly Punjabi touch to the rich and strange mix between communist and radical ideologies of the left and mainstream nationalism. Left-wing politics, mostly travelling under the broad umbrella term of 'communism', have been an integral part of the Indian political scene for almost a century. One of the main arguments of this book is that the organised left, whether communist or socialist, had an important role to play in Indian politics, not least because the different groups which constituted these movements, in their different ways and in many different arenas, joined in an assault upon the structures of control by which the British ruled India.

Communism in India has had as its major project to capture power, not simply to improve the lot of workers and peasants in other ways. In this enterprise, the left had to adapt its programmes and also to tailor the language in which they were cast, to reflect the concerns of its constituents. In so doing, the communists had an important impact upon the terms and vocabulary of Indian politics more generally. The effect of the left on Indian politics has not been simple; it has helped to change these politics in complex and unexpected ways. After India gained independence, the ministries formed by communist parties in several states have not followed the path predicted by Marx and other founding fathers of communism. They have not been organised according to models laid down by the Comintern. Nor have the communists managed to impose a monopoly upon the politics of the left in India. Innumerable other groups, all broadly on the left, have adopted, and adapted, the language of class struggle and have professed radical, socialist or even communist purposes in their political endeavours. It follows that the history of the left in India calls to be told and understood from this broad perspective.

There is another significant point which must be made. Communism in India was perceived as a danger by the colonial regime not simply because it was a movement of a subject people; indeed European communists in India were denied the legal privileges customarily afforded to the white man in India. In important respects, it was a movement not characterised simply in racial terms. A glaring omission by the subaltern school and its recent historiography, which has focused mainly on the concerns of unorganised groups, has been the history of the left. Of course, any history of the left owes a huge debt to subaltern historians in South Asia, who in their turn were influenced by E. P. Thompson and others in their study of the origins and development of class consciousness, and the 'way in which these [class] experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas, and institutional forms.'[2] The contributions of Gyanendra Pandey in particular to the themes and topics addressed by this work are important and calls to be acknowledged. But the big difference between the work of the subalterns and this study, at least in its aims, is to examine the planned strategies of consciously political actors, who operated through organised political bodies, not the spontaneous, 'subaltern' revolts at the base of society.[3] Subaltern studies have, in the main, eschewed the history of those elites who saw themselves as communist or socialist and believed that their ideological vision of society could transform the world. By contrast, historians in the subaltern tradition see the actions of these elites as part of the broader historiography of nationalism, which, in their opinion, has ignored what was happening at the grass roots of Indian protest and revolt.

This book, therefore, is no part of the subaltern enterprise, it follows that it is not of the essence to take a definitive view on whether the findings of the subaltern school throw light on the subject or whether they simply lead it into a cul-de-sac. Leaving that debate aside, two points call to be stressed in any history of the organised left in India. First, after Gandhi's rise to power and the coming of the Russian Revolution of 1917, all politics in India that sought to mobilise the masses but did not accept the Gandhian mode of non-violence and *satyagraha*, tended to be seen, and were classified in the colonial archive, as part of the 'Bolshevik menace'.[4]

This categorisation simplifies and distorts a story which had in it many different strands. Also it exaggerates the strength of the Communist Party of India (CPI). On the other hand, the collective autobiography of the communist movement has been keen to appropriate to itself credit for every campaign and every movement of popular protest, that took place in India before 1947. This is especially the case in the Punjab, where writers sympathetic to the left have been wont to create a 'tradition' of communism, which, *mirabile dictu*, even predates 1917.[5] It is salutary for the reader to be reminded that these creators of myth and legend speak of a Communist Party which in 1947 consisted of a rump of only 2000 official members.[6] In the pre-partition Punjab, many groups, such as the Kirti Kisan movement, the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association, the Naujawan Bharat Sabha and even the Congress Socialist Party as well as the Communist Party itself, appealed to the peoples of the Punjab through the slogans of communism, class struggle and variants of what they deemed to be Marxism. They were among numerous other groups in India which were linked to the broader international movement that travelled under the name of communism. These different groups did not subscribe to common ideology and strategy laid down by international communism. Rather they all deployed the language of class struggle. In consequence, it makes good sense to label their politics as 'radical' for the purposes of this book, however divided these groups were in their strategies, tactics and even ideologies.

It is also evident that the study of the left has been distorted by the failure of historians to grasp the inwardness of the communist movement in India, exaggerating its alien origins and its 'foreign' ideology. One consequence of seeing communism as an import from abroad is that its proponents are deemed by mainstream nationalists to have been wholly misguided and 'traitors' to the dominant national mode, which was the Gandhian way. In a crude dichotomy, communism tends to be compared and contrasted with Gandhism, with communism condemned as a deeply negative strategy: to infiltrate, capture and sow discontent in order to provoke chaos and then to reap the benefits of that chaos. In this manner, the critics of communism have often followed the crude perspective of the British, who saw communists as 'opportunist',[7] 'robotic followers of Moscow'[8] or 'liars',[9] whose plans and purposes were essentially incompatible with the Indian and the Gandhian way. Another weakness of the existing literature on communism in India is that it concentrates upon the party at the national level. Looking at decision-making processes in a party which was centralised misses important local and provincial dimensions which tell us more about the history of the left than just looking at the centre. Moreover, analysis on these lines, in which communism everywhere is seen to have been dictated by the Comintern, derives from a Cold War perspective and does not take the subject forward. Overstreet and Windmiller's *Communism in India*,[10] an authoritative work on communism in India,[11] is itself guilty of exaggerating the influence of the Comintern at the base, and even on the periphery of movements, whether in India or elsewhere.[12] It fails to make due allowance for the extraordinary diversity of Indian politics, the context in which communists and radicals generally had to either adapt or to perish.

Concentrating on national politics at the centre is, thus, a major weakness in the historiography of communism in India, since it neglects the crucial role of regions in Indian politics. To understand communism in India, its very different manifestations in different regions, particularly those where the Communist Party of India has been relatively strong such as Bengal, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and the Punjab, call to be examined and assessed.

To be sure, a beginning has been made by others, and some regional political histories of the party have indeed been written. These include the works of Pavier on Telengana; Singh, Javed and Josh on the Punjab; Nossiter on Kerala; and all those, whether historians or political scientists, who have looked at the Naxalite movement in Bengal.[13] However, most of these works tend to view the regional parties as integral parts of a national machine through which the centre imposed structure and control over the regions. The studies of Dilip Menon on Kerala, admittedly, have a somewhat different perspective. His analysis of communism in that province takes account of its cultural and regional specificities. Menon recognises that communists were pragmatic and that this pragmatism was the key to the party's successes in Kerala. By showing the gulf between party policy and directives on the one hand and their implementation at local levels on the other, he has qualified the 'centralist' conclusions of the dominant historiography in this subject. However, Menon's findings on Kerala have a limited relevance to the Punjab. In the first place, the state in Malabar had relatively little importance compared with its overweening role in the Punjab.[14] So the state's relationship with the Kerala Communist Party was bound to be less critical than the relationship between the state and the radicals of the Punjab. But, despite these differences, Menon's approach has provided useful lessons for this study of the Punjab, which the author gratefully acknowledges.

The main argument of this book is that regions and their characteristics define local politics and have a significant impact upon the relationship between centre and province. It will seek to go beyond the findings of other works on the history of communism in the Punjab. In 1979, Bhagwan Josh's pioneering book on communism in the Punjab was published; in 1988 and later in 1994, Ajeet Javed and Gurharpal Singh took the subject further.[15] Each of these works has a different focus. Josh belongs to a tradition of historiography in which communism tends to be seen as an unsound project at a time when the only legitimate politics was the dominant nationalism of the Congress movement. Whig (or indeed Congress) interpretations of history have concentrated on why the organised left failed, inevitably from this particluar angle of vision. Bipan Chandra, for example, although sympathetic to the politics of the left, writes:

> We have also wanted to find out why the [Communist] party has so often been wrong in political assessments and predictions, why it has been constantly outpaced by events, and why instead of being able to see the emerging reality, even if hidden in the womb of time, as a party based on the scientific or Marxist interpretation of reality is supposed to be able to do, it has invariably been late to recognize even the emerged reality which has stared it in the face.[16]

By contrast, Gurharpal Singh and Ajeet Javed, by examining a wide range of sources, have added much detail to our knowledge of the political history of the movement. Their works, however, are mainly concerned with the organisation of the party, the factionalism within the left, trade union activity and the peasant or kisan movements of the region. But these works also tend to be a litany of the errors of the left, of wasted lives in which communists of the colonial Punjab have made mistake after historic mistake, not least because of their slavish adherence to the diktat of the central party. Gurharpal Singh's main concern is with the 'potentially crucial variable of communist organisation'.[17] By giving due weight to the powerfully hierarchical nature of communist organisation, its so-called 'democratic' centralism, his work offers a corrective to that of Bhagwan Josh, who is mainly concerned with the emotional appeal of Marxism to the 'theoretically backward' Punjabis. But Gurharpal Singh's book adds little to an understanding of the nature of popular dissent in the Punjab or the political context in which the left emerged. These works tell us much about the inner workings of the Communist Party in the Punjab, but little about the relationship of the left with the Indian National Congress.

Of course the Congress in the Punjab was, from first to last, weak and this is a lesson why its political history has attracted little attention. By contrast, this book will argue that before partition Congress was linked to the left more closely than has previously been assumed. The mainly Hindu leadership of Congress looked to the left to recruit followers in the Punjab countryside and, in a symbiotic relationship, the leaders of the left, vilified, arrested and imprisoned though they were, needed Congress to give them a platform from which they could plan and propagate their ideologies. It follows that the institutions of the Punjab and its 'school' of administration, the imperatives of local politics, whether Congress, Akali, Muslim League or others on the margins of dissent, are critical elements in understanding the significance of the politics of radical left politics in the Punjab, or indeed the larger history of the communist movement in India.

Chapter 1 in its first part sets out the background for the study. It focuses upon the Punjab, as a region. It explores political traditions and norms, in an attempt to understand how the political structures, identities and expectations of the Punjab were transformed by British rule. It also touches upon the cultural memory of Punjabis, their notions and codes of behaviour which, whatever their divisions, they had in common, all as part of an effort to uncover the genealogy of radicalism in the province and the colonial response to the radical movement.

The focus of the second part of Chapter 1 is to enquire how government hoped to control communism in the Punjab by criminalising it and branding the politics of the left as an integral part of the 'Bolshevik menace'. It explores the theme from the different perspectives of the government at the centre and of the provincial capital of the Punjab, Lahore. But both the government at the centre and the provincial government in the Punjab saw communism as a threat to the norms of 'decency' and 'civilisation', an alien and atheist import which had no legitimate place in the political landscape of India.

Chapter 2 marks the start of a substantive analysis of the left in the Punjab. It looks at radical responses to the colonial state in an effort to 'recover' the meaning of communism as it was understood by the left. Given the factionalism and infighting between leftist groups in the Punjab, the emphasis of the analysis is upon the three occasions when the left united to articulate what it saw to be 'class' politics. This chapter looks at the ways in which some socialists and communists in the Punjab came together for a brief moment in the late 1920s under the aegis of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha. This short-lived organisation of students has a greater relevance than its swift passage through the history of the Punjab would suggest; the Sabha made more of a contribution to leftist history than has previously been recognised, and that contribution was cast in a particularly Punjabi idiom. In their effort to discover 'communism', Punjabis in their turn influenced how communism was perceived in India. The ways in which 'extremist nationalist politics' constantly adapted their construction of 'revolutionary socialism' in an effort to carve out a space for themselves, distinct from the politics of the Indian National Congress, is a recurring theme in this book. Students though they were, the politics of the members of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha tended to be pedagogical, the aim being, having awakened the masses, above all to educate them to protest against a state seen as alien and oppressive. Essentially, their differences with Congress and Gandhi were always more important than what they had in common with mainstream Indian nationalism. In particular, they were proponents of a politics which can only be described as 'masculine', grounded as they were on the example of the Sikh martyrs of the past and the *babas* or veterans of the Ghadr movement.[18]

Chapter 3 describes a transitional period in the history of the organised left in the Punjab from the mid-1930s. After the 1935 Government of India Act, communists and socialists allied with each other to try and spread their ideas, garner support and gain entry into the reformed councils. In the elections of 1937, the activities of the left and the success at the polls of seven of their members reveals much about the priorities of the left. Also, it is significant how the institutions of electoral politics imposed particular constraints, almost a 'code of political conduct', upon the so-called revolutionary parties in the Punjab and how this affected their work in the constitutional arena. This also was the time when the state officially banned communism and outlawed seven of the organisations associated with the party.

Previous studies of communist politics in India either have taken as read (without usually analysing why) that activists from the left accepted parliamentary democracy as a legitimate route to political power or have condemned the left for taking the constitutional path as evidence that its members were not truly revolutionary. Chapter 3 attempts to explore, in a more factual way, what participation in the elections to the Punjab Legislative Assembly meant for the left and explores its intentions in entering the constitutional arena. But of course such an enquiry requires, conversely, an examination of why and how the state dealt, or hoped to deal, with the entry of its erstwhile enemies into a constitutional forum.

Finally, Chapter 4 examines the Punjab during the Second World War. The

adoption in 1942 by the Communist Party of India of the line that the war was a People's War has been widely regarded as the ultimate betrayal of Indian nationalism by the communists and is seen as the main reason why they came to be so isolated and rejected by all shades of opinion in Indian politics. It is also seen as evidence that it was Moscow which called the shots for communists in India. However, in the Punjab, which was the main source of recruits for the Indian armies, essential to Britain's war effort, the recently legalised and united Communist Party took the opportunity of war to strengthen its bases of support.[19] Chapter 4 also considers the prelude to partition; by investigating the reactions of the left in the Punjab to the prospect of vivisection, it touches, albeit briefly, on what partition meant for the two independent successor states created when the British left India in 1947. However improbably, the communists saw themselves as a third force in the Punjab whose historic mission was to bring together the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League and help find a secular solution to the demand for Pakistan. By looking at the activities and slogans of left-wing agitators rather than the theoretical tracts of the leaders of the central Communist Party, new light can be thrown upon old questions about the complex relationship between the left and nationalism.

The last chapter, thus, brings out the two main themes which underpin this work, one being 'unconventional' communism and the other the contradictory practices of the state, which together may help us better to understand a neglected and complex period in the history of modern India. Historical accounts of the Second World War have, not surprisingly, been dominated by the coming of independence and the partition which accompanied it. In these narratives, the war tends to be seen as a catalyst and these outcomes are seen as consequences of the Raj in retreat and nationalism in the ascendant. This work will suggest that there were other, less dramatic, but nonetheless important, developments also taking place at this time and that the Punjab's experience of the war, so different from that of Bengal, the other main province of India which was partitioned in 1947, deserves to be looked at from these new perspectives.

Another important development was the left's failure in the 1946 elections. Most commentators, whether the contemporary leaders of independent India or scholars from both the left and the right, see this failure as a predictable outcome for a party that had betrayed Gandhi's Quit India movement and chosen to place the Soviet Union's interests above those of India. However, this chapter will challenge this simplistic analysis and show how local politics, as partition became imminent, offers a more subtle explanation of why the left failed so spectacularly at the polls on the eve of independence.

Sources

A variety of sources have been used in this book, among them primary materials including Indian official reports, particularly those of the police. It has also deployed newspapers and Communist Party records and literature, supplemented by oral interviews with key participants. As the approach of this book lies in the

no-man's land between two disciplines, history and political science, it has had to depend not only on the colonial archive but also the more exiguous communist archive. But both archives have had to be approached with caution. Scrutinised with a necessarily sceptical eye, neither the views of the apologists nor those of critics of government have, it is hoped, been taken at face value. Wherever possible, the historical record has been set against and tested by contemporary reviews about their assumptions, sometimes flawed and sometimes simply wrong. In particular, this work has questioned commonly held views and tried to avoid stereotypical conclusions which, in the past, have distorted such little knowledge and in fact imperfect understanding as we have of a little known, but nevertheless important, subject in the history of the Punjab and of India.

1 The Punjab, communism and the state

Section I: Political Punjab

The Punjab has a distinctive history which is very different from that of other parts of India. Their last major conquest in India, the British ruled the province for less than 100 years. Economically, the land of five rivers was to become India's granary in the late colonial period. Militarily, it was the province from which the post-Mutiny armies of British India were mainly recruited. Socially, the Punjab had a unique mix of Muslims (the majority community), Hindus and Sikhs. Administratively and politically, its trajectory was unlike that of the rest of India. In the Punjab the British had their greatest successes, whether by its rule, in the second half of the nineteenth century, in the so-called Punjab tradition of administration or, later during dyarchy, by achieving the successful working of ministries which were supra-communal and which managed to repulse the inroads of the all-India parties of nationalism, the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League. Yet it is particularly ironic that the Punjab, a model of difference and by most standards of colonial success, should, when the British left India, have been torn apart in a bloody partition which left much of its society, its economy and its polity in tatters. The purpose of radical politicians was to dig under the surface of the Punjab, which superficially seemed so loyal and prosperous. Throughout British rule the radical students and militants, often ideologically confused and always outside the mainstream of politics, remained a tiny minority. But radicals on the left were evidence of quite deep currents of discontent and they throw new light on the peculiar, and peculiarly interesting, political history of the Punjab.

Yet, there are many Punjabs. Throughout its turbulent history, Punjab's borders have been in flux, cut about, extended and redefined. In the last century, the British Indian province of the Punjab was divided into two in its partition in 1947 between India and Pakistan. Again in 1966, the boundaries of the new state of the Punjab in independent India (essentially its eastern districts) were changed. In part, this was a consequence of history, the fact that the Punjab has been a marcher region, on the margins of empires to the north and to the east. Situated between Afghanistan and the land-based empires of the mid-Gangetic plain, these frontier tracts were inhabited in the main by martial peasant tribes. The so-called land of the five rivers – the Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas and Sutlej are tributaries of

the mighty Indus, once lauded 'as the beautiful forehead of Hindustan' by Waris Shah, an early chronicler of the Punjab – was the gateway into India as well as the border through which all invaders from the north-west had to pass.[1]

The Punjab which is the subject of this book is the province of that name conquered by the British in 1849. Historians of the Punjab tend to see religion as the chief motor driving its politics.[2] But religion in the Punjab has taken many forms. Some Punjabis have rejected Hinduism, particularly in its Brahmanical guise. According to commonly accepted stereotypes, Punjabis are characterised as a people more profane than spiritual, driven by the pitchfork of economic necessity rather than by the ideals of one religion or the other. Yet the reality, of course, lies somewhere in between, depending on which sections of a diverse and by no means homogeneous population is under scrutiny.

Yet the Punjab was atypical of much of British India. To administer it, the British deployed methods quite different from those used in the maritime presidencies of Bengal, Bombay and Madras. The famous Punjab School of administration had its origins in a perception of the Punjab rooted in the experience of the eighteenth century. A marcher region, the Punjab had turned against its Mughal overlords and also fought against most of its neighbours. Out of the military and social turmoil which followed, there emerged the 'Sikh' kingdom of the Punjab. By allying with the Punjab's other communities and by cleverly winning over their key leaders, Ranjit Singh's kingdom proved to be a model for the Punjab School of administration under the British and some decades later, in the twentieth century, for the Unionist Party, whose ministries dominated the province in the last twenty-five years of British rule. Just as John Lawrence was the uncovenanted legatee of Ranjit Singh, so also, paradoxically, was Sikander Hyat Khan, the leader of the Unionists, themselves the heirs of Lawrence and the Punjab School of administration.

The land

Water dominates the political economy of most oriental societies, not least of the Punjab. In the words of Malcolm Darling, an old Punjab hand who had a special relationship with the province in which he served for so long and loved so deeply, 'So valuable, in fact, is water that property in it arose before property in land.'[3] Throughout the Punjab's recorded history, its rulers strove to control the rivers which irrigated the land. Just as their predecessors before them, the British understood the critical importance of water and in the later nineteenth century began to invest huge resources into irrigation systems, which were intended to consolidate their rule in the Punjab. As Spate aptly put it, 'It is clear that in the strictest sense the prosperity of the Punjab [was] artificial, dependent as it is on the efficient working of an extremely intricate man-made machine; and for this, political stability is the obvious first essential.'[4] Given its fertile alluvial soil, which stretches all the way from the Indus to Delhi, the agrarian economy of the Punjab had a measure of homogeneity under the Mughals and under the Sikhs, reinforced by revenue collection systems which the Sikh kingdom inherited from

its Mughal predecessors and which taxed village communities rather than individual peasants.

The Punjab falls naturally into three main geographical regions, one stretching from the north to the extreme south of the province, from the North West Frontier Province border to Rajasthan. This region consists of tracts of land that was largely infertile and sparsely populated. In this unpromising and arid territory, tiny hamlets of sometimes no more than four or five families lived under the sway of local *pirs*, Muslim holy men, and of *jagirdars* or landholders. Unlike the rest of the province, here a relatively small number of families owned most of the land. They were the dominant landowners, families such as the Shahs of Gojra and Multan, the Akbar family of Jhelum or the Tiwanas of Shahpur, whose influence remains in today's politics of this region, now part of Pakistan. In this region the great majority of the population, about 80 per cent, was Muslim, although Hindu moneylenders and artisans of the Khatri and Bania castes could also be found in market centres such as Multan. Sawan Mal, a Bania or trader, who rose to be governor of Multan under Ranjit Singh, had pioneered the construction of small 'inundated' canals to a measure of irrigation to these dry lands.[5] However, such canals were useless during the dry weather when they were most needed. It was only in 1859, ten years after the British annexation of the Punjab, that the first modern canal was built in this part of the province, bringing in due course, rich harvests to fields that for so long had been barren.

The second main region was central Punjab, which, as Darling describes it, was the cradle of the Sikhs. In central Punjab, the Sikhs were the most numerous community, particularly in the countryside; and their power and influence had grown immeasurably during Ranjit Singh's long reign from 1799 to 1839. Situated between two low-lying riverine tracts, the crops of central Punjab tended to be good when the weather was normal. But in conditions of drought, its people, many of whom were Jat Sikhs whose 'brotherhoods' owned small farms, failed to grow enough food to keep themselves alive, let alone prosperous. So the exigencies of nature forced the inhabitants of central Punjab to seek alternative ways of earning their keep, whether by joining the armies of the Raj or moving to other parts of British India in search of employment. Central Punjab had two big towns, one being Lahore, sometimes described as the Queen of the Punjab, the seat of government and a centre of education, which boasted (in the 1920s) more bookshops than towns of a comparable size in England.[6] The second big city was Amritsar, a large trading town, which came to be an important market for traders from as far afield as Kashmir, Tibet and Sinkiang.[7] Here moneylenders prospered, *kazis* kept the law according to local custom (be that the Shariat or the Hukum Nama), and traders ran bazaars that linked the Punjab with the outside world. Amritsar also housed the Golden Temple, the most important of all Sikh gurdwaras. But, even though Amritsar was the epicentre of Sikh culture and religion, Sikhs were far from being the majority community in Amritsar district as a whole, being a mere 15 per cent of the population. Both Lahore and Amritsar relied heavily on Hindu and Muslim trading castes to sustain their market economies; and the administration, which was based in the capital city of the province,

Lahore, whether bureaucrats or lawyers, also tended to be recruited mainly from Muslims and Hindus, and the city's urban economy was underpinned by a host of lower castes.

The third region of the Punjab consisted of the eastern tracts, which stretched from the foothills of Kangra to Ambala, and was the most prosperous part of the province. It was also the most densely populated, especially the districts of Hoshiarpur, Jullunder and Ludhiana. According to Darling, in these fertile plains, the 'evils of small-holding' were particularly evident. The eastern tracts also contained many untouchables, roughly 25 per cent of the population. The dominant castes in the east were Rajputs who, legend has it, 'cultivate[d], hookah in hand,'[8] and Jats, whether Hindu, Sikh or Muslim, who were reputed to have 'a tenacity of character and a skill in farming which makes them the best cultivators in India.'[9] Jullunder, an important rail-head, Ludhiana and Ambala, all of which came to be centres of industry and commerce under British rule, were the main towns in the east. Ambala also had an important role as a cantonment town, strategically situated as it was between the plains and the foothills of the Himalayas.

With 55 per cent of its population Muslim, 13 per cent Sikh and the remainder Hindu, with a sprinkling of Jains, Buddhists and Christians, the Punjab had an eclectic religious mix. Islam's influence in the Punjab was increasingly evident the further west one went. But even in the west, Muslims were by no means a homogeneous community, divided as they were into competing brotherhoods, owing allegiance to various pirs or leaders. In central or eastern Punjab, the different religious communities tended to have more in common with each other than in the west. Everywhere, Jats and Rajputs, less than a third of the population as a whole, dominated the countryside through their networks of class, kin and lineage.[10] Two other groups among the Muslims call for a particular mention: the Sheikhs and Sayeds, and also the Arains, who traditionally were market gardeners. But it is significant that, when they came to enumerate and classify the population of the Punjab, the British tended to deploy categories such as 'Jats', 'Arains' or 'Rajputs', in other words, census categories denoting tribal groups rather than castes or religious communities. In this way, the category of Jats included Hindus, Sikhs and even Muslims. Another feature of British taxonomy, for example Ibbetson's influential work on Punjab's tribes and castes, was to attribute different characteristics to the people of the Punjab depending on from where they came. In the extreme west, Punjabis were seen as superstitious and lacking in enterprise. In the central and eastern Punjab, the sturdy Jats were seen as the province's backbone and the key to its prosperity. However crude these stereotypes,[11] they were used by the British as the building blocks of their policy and had a disproportionate influence on their revenue system, which was specifically designed to protect the agriculturalist against moneylenders and traders, the banias who 'spends his life in his shop, and the results are apparent in his inferior physique and utter want of manliness. He is looked down upon by the peasantry as a cowardly money grubber.'[12]

Despite the diversity and differences which divided the peoples of the Punjab, they did have some characteristics in common. Throughout the province, people

spoke one language, Punjabi, and had a popular culture and oral traditions in common. Most Punjabis – their different faiths notwithstanding – shared a belief in *panth* (or community) and *kismet* (or predetermined fate).[13] *Panths* followed a particular spiritual guide, whether a *Guru*, *Sant*, *Yogi*, *Mahant*, *Sheikh*, *Pir* or *Baba*.[14] They also had a common worldview influenced by notions of fate which helped to make sense of the 'otherwise inexplicable, and [of turning] adversity in its tracks', and believed that, however much an individual's fate might appear to be predetermined, the intervention of powerful human agencies could change destinies.[15]

Another powerful theme in the world view of Punjabis was the notion of *izzat,* literally, pride or respect, which was used to justify their challenge of accepted norms.[16] The fifth Sikh Guru, Hargobind and the tenth, Gobind Singh, are both celebrated as defenders of the notion of *izzat*, specifically the defence of Sikh religion against Mughal repression.[17] *Izzat* could also denote pride in landownership, the honour of rulers and of patrons, which was the basis of the deference and respect accorded to powerful patrons by their clients both in rural Punjab and in its towns.

The Punjab's political traditions

The history of the Punjab before the coming of British rule is by no means a seamless web, its politics being characterised by frequent ruptures and breaks. Yet the historiography of the Punjab, particularly in works written by the British, divides its history into periods which are Muslim or Sikh, with Ranjit Singh's long reign being seen as a time when the Sikhs were in the ascendant.[18] More recent histories are a corrective to this simplistic periodisation, showing, as they do, the powerful continuities between the so-called Muslim or Sikh or indeed the British periods in the history of the Punjab. These continuities are most evident in the tradition of giving land to mosque or gurdwara alike; and the importance of monarchy in a supposedly demotic society. However much Sikh mythology depicts Ranjit Singh as 'a man of the people', in fact he was as remote from the ordinary man as the supposedly aloof Muslim sovereigns who came before him. In his statecraft, strategies and tactics, Ranjit Singh borrowed copiously from his predecessors. His administration, and both the substance and the forms of his government, had all, to a greater or lesser extent, been tried and tested by rulers who came before him, whether the systems of revenue collection, the organisation of armies or the police, or the wide-ranging patronage of different religious communities, Muslims quite as much as Sikhs. Beyond these fundamentally important continuities, there lies the overarching fact of Punjabi society, which calls to be identified and underlined. Power at the local level was concentrated in the hands of warrior families who controlled the villages and collected the revenues of the state through *chaudharis*, *patwaris* and *muqaddams.*[19] In these structures of power and control, the all-important role was that of the dominant clan leaders. Their support was vital for any regime, Muslim, Sikh or British, and much of the state policy of every ruler of the Punjab was directed at winning and retaining their collaboration.[20]

The Punjab School of administration

British rule in India was not all of a piece. The modes of its administration varied significantly from region to region, in response to the changing circumstances of different contexts and different periods. But, from first to last, British rule had some characteristics which remained constant. British India had to pay for its administration and for its defence; and its administration and its armies were controlled from the top by the rulers, through an elite corps of almost exclusively white civil servants drawn in the main from the Indian Civil Service, whose officers were predominantly British. In the imperial equations of profit and power, the Punjab had an important, indeed a critical, role to play. Significantly, many of the officials, who settled the Punjab and ran the administration after it was annexed in the mid-nineteenth century, were recruited from the ranks of senior army officers. As military men, with experience of fighting on the frontiers of British India and then having a key role in putting down the Mutiny of 1857, these army officers had a deep influence upon how the Punjab was run. The key figures in the Punjab School, as these administrators came to be known, tended to see themselves as having a special mission in a region which in its turn had a special role, as the martial gatekeepers of India and the manpower in the garrisons which defended the Raj and promoted its purposes overseas, all roles which the Punjab had arrogated to itself by helping to put down the Mutiny. Indeed the essence of the Punjab School was that it was an essentially military mission posited on a particular and personal system of civil rule.

In 1849, after the Punjab had been conquered, annexed and disarmed, Dalhousie set up a Punjab Board of Administration,[21] which was given licence to rule by executive order. As 'Cross' Beames, a self-confessedly cantankerous but deeply observant and acute ICS officer who served in the Punjab from 1859 to 1861, testifies, 'There was no law in the Punjab in those days. Our instructions were to decide all cases by the light of common sense and our own sense of what was just and right.'[22] Law and order was maintained by officers on the spot, in order 'to uphold native institutions and practices as far as they are consistent with the distribution of justice to all classes.'[23] Customary tradition took precedence over the rules and regulations which had been put into place in the rest of British India. The Punjab's Civil Code, drawn up within five years of its annexation,[24] was intended to serve as a repository of the Punjab's customs and it became the 'sole substantive law' of the province,[25] so much so that the preamble to the Punjab Laws Act of 1872 had to insist that 'the position of the Government of India towards conquered provinces did not [. . .] mean or intend that the early administrators of the Punjab should be a law unto themselves.'[26] The purpose of the 1872 Act was to bring the Punjab into line with the rest of India, by incorporating some of the provisions of the Indian Penal Code of 1861. But, in many respects, the Punjab remained a law unto itself. The way the Punjab was run was designed to underpin the particular imperial purposes it was seen to serve. Its revenue system was constructed to promote and secure the interests of landed groups who were seen as supporters of the Raj. By allowing the landowners of the Punjab to keep

three-quarters of the revenue which they collected, and by giving them special rights and privileges such as alleviations in the amounts of land revenue they paid until the harvests were in,[27] the Punjab government planned to tie the landed elites and dominant peasants of the province to their cause. In their utopian vision of the Punjab, they envisaged a land 'thickly populated by a fat, contented yeomanry, each man riding his own horse, sitting under his own fig tree, and enjoying his rude family comforts.'[28] These sturdy and loyal men of the soil were seen to be the foundations of the political stability of the Punjab and in its turn one of the keystones of the security of the British Raj in India. The Punjab also played a critical role by providing manpower for the armies of British India. The Mutiny forced the British to reconsider fundamentally their strategy from which of the peoples of India they could most safely recruit their armies. Henceforth the plan was to enlist their troops from martial races, particularly those who had remained loyal to the British during the great uprising. The Punjab's irregulars – Sikhs, Rajputs Hindus and Muslim Jats – had been critically important in putting down the Mutiny. They, and other newly discovered 'martial races', were now to be the troops chosen to defend the empire, both as internal garrisons and as imperial battering rams throughout the eastern arc of Britain's empire.

In tying the Punjab to these purposes, the British deployed every device and stratagem they were able to discover. A key element was to control the waters of the rivers of the Punjab through an elaborate system of irrigation. Canals were built, first, to bring cultivation to the sparsely inhabited and dry areas surrounding Multan, and then to the central Punjab. Hundreds of thousands of acres were irrigated and successfully brought under the plough. The Upper Jhelum canal alone gave water and hence cultivation to more than 350,000 acres which previously had been unproductive land. The Lower Chenab canals ensured that cultivation in 2.5 million acres was no longer dependent on the vagaries of the monsoon. These projects, begun after the Mutiny was put down in 1859, took four decades and more to complete, changing the topography and the existing demographic patterns of the Punjab. Montgomery and Lyallypur, now irrigated districts bearing the names of their British administrators, came rapidly to support a growing population and provided fertile land which proved to be a powerful engine of patronage by which government was able to reward those who had faithfully served in their armies.

In these ways, the canal colonies made land available to the Raj for its political purposes. For example, Baba Sir Khem Singh Bedi was given over 7000 acres of valuable newly colonised land.[29] Afforcing its alliances with its friends and collaborators was the underlying purpose of these policies which included building canals, engineering the migration on a grand scale of families to newly irrigated lands and creating prosperous villages where none had existed before. The dramatic increase in population of districts such as Montgomery and Lyallpur from 416,669 and 60,306 respectively in 1891 to 1,814,000 and 2,157,000 in 1951 makes the point. The boost which canal irrigation gave to its agrarian economy, the 'peasantization' of the Punjab (as it has been called by Washbrook[30]) turned the Punjab into the granary of the subcontinent. However, as Tomlinson has observed:

> the economic effects of these new settlements were somewhat muted, since the Punjab government used the creation of the colonies to indulge in a wide-reaching programme of social engineering, making land grants directly to those it wished to favour for political or social reasons, rather than to those who were necessarily the best to make use of the new resources of land and water for efficient agricultural production.[31]

Another powerful instrument of social engineering and control deployed by the Punjab School was the Land Alienation Act of 1901, which was put onto the statute books because of growing British concerns that acquisitive moneylenders were grabbing land from its rightful owners, and in this way undermining the traditional fabric and power structures of the village communities of the province.[32] Moneylenders were aquiring land which rightfully belonged to peasant families. Increasingly, Muslim agriculturalists, it was feared by administrators of the province, were being bought out by Hindus belonging to commercial and trading groups, as well as by acquisitive Sikhs; and this was seen as endangering the social bases of stability in rural Punjab and hence the very security of British rule. The Punjab government's response was calibrated through an elaborate series of essays in classification, distinguishing between 'agricultural' and 'non-agricultural' tribes and castes. For example, village menials were deemed to be 'non-agricultural', as were many artisan groups and most of Hinduism's highest caste, the Brahmins. 'Agricultural' Muslim groups deemed to be in need of protection included Sayeds, Pathans and Moghuls, and such diverse people from a range of communities as Arains, Jats, Rajputs and Gujjars. After the Land Alienation Bill became law in 1901, many different groups claimed protection under it. Achieving the privileged status which the Act gave to its beneficiaries became a main purpose in the politics of many groups in the Punjab. The Act divided the Punjab into distinct rural and urban sectors and in time the consequences of this legislation came to be the driving force behind the creation, and the power, of the Unionist Party, founded after 1920 specifically to represent the interests of agriculturalists against urban outsiders.

In the late nineteenth century, government's main imperative in the Punjab was to promote and secure the loyalty of the countryside. This, according to the official mind, called less for formal political institutions, and more for a style of administration suited to a rural and unsophisticated peoples. Although the Indian Council Act of 1861 empowered government to set up legislative assemblies throughout British India, the Punjab had to wait thirty-six years before it was given a council of its own. As late as 1909, the government of the Punjab continued to nominate all nine Indian members in the fledgling council in Lahore. The reason was simple: the province, just as the North West Frontier, was thought not to be ready for public participation in politics, particularly through elections. So every non-official representative in the Punjab Council was nominated by the administration, which, to a man, stuck to its rule that the Punjab needed its traditional native leaders to keep the 'classes below them' in order.[33] The Statutory Commission described the pre-war Punjab in these words:

> As compared with some other provinces, the Punjab was backward in education; in all India politics, its representatives were at that period less conspicuous than those of many other parts of India, and this fact tended to confirm their impression of a lack of active interest among the people at large in regard to political activity;[34]

and the view, not in fact at all an accurate reflection of the reality on the ground, that the peoples of the Punjab had no interest in politics remains a powerful myth to this day. This misconception has its roots in the cast of the official mind of the Punjab at the time when the 1861 Councils Act was being drafted.

> Under both governments (Punjab and NWFP) there are intelligent, wealthy and influential native gentlemen many of them attached to our rule and having a large stake in its stability and power, although ignorant of our language and not familiar with our ways. Their participation with us in the making of laws for their Provinces would be a help to us and acceptable to their own class and to the classes below them. To secure this we may be content to forgo something of these formalities which would preclude all natives who cannot talk English fluently, and who are not accustomed to our modes of business, from taking a useful part in legislation.[35]

In this exposition, the key assumptions of the Punjab School of administration are bluntly spelt out.

But the Punjab School did not completely reject the potential utility of representation. After 1883, municipal committees and rural district boards were set up in the Punjab as elsewhere in British India, and became active arenas of local politics where some of the participants were elected, albeit by narrow and restricted electorates. In the early twentieth century, efforts were made to resurrect *panchayats,* or village councils, and in the Punjab they became yet another forum in which the 'natural' leaders or clan heads were encouraged to wield their traditional influence over local affairs.

All in all, the British were not dissatisfied by what they thought they had achieved in the Punjab, a land which in its turbulent past had been ravaged by Marathas and Gurkhas, mismanaged by the Sikhs and always prey to drought and famine. By 1921, the Census Commissioner could boast that, in the Punjab, 'the peace and security afforded by the British administration, combined with government activity, led to material progress at a rate which elsewhere would be little short of miraculous.'[36] The prosperity of the Punjab countryside had been promoted by investment in development, above all by irrigation of the land. The Punjab, so its government believed, had thus been built into being a loyal pillar and prop of the Raj. As Sir Michael O'Dwyer, the Governor of the province from 1912 to 1919, observed after the First World War:

> As a result of the Act the Punjab landowner, the finest body of peasantry in the East, who but for it would now be largely a landless discontented proletariat,

> . . . have been staunchly loyal to the British Government. The best proof of this is that we were able to raise from them three hundred and sixty thousand fighting men . . . in the four years of the Great War.[36]

Yet it was the First World War that first made visible the fissures and cracks in the much vaunted Punjab system, both in the countryside and in the towns. Increasingly, the Punjab showed that it was not immune to what was happening in other parts of India. The founding of the Arya Samaj, and other reforming organisations among Sikhs and Muslims, was one of many signs of change.[38] Urban Punjab had begun to produce an intelligentsia of its own, English-educated people concerned not only to look at their own cultural traditions with a critical eye but also to join the movements of protest and reform in other parts of India. In the process, some influential groups in the Punjab began to redefine their identity, challenging colonial stereotypes as much as their own traditional perceptions of themselves.

Much more threatening developments, from the point of view of the rulers, were the signs of discontent and disturbance in the countryside. In 1907, agitation against water rates led by urban leaders, Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh, caught the British by surprise. Deporting these troublemakers was the only way the agitation could be halted. In 1915, an even more serious plot against the Punjab government was foiled, one which threatened to bring about a mutiny of the Punjab's soldiers during the war. Many hundreds of Punjabis, in league with Germany, returned to the Punjab from the United States in the somewhat quixotic enterprise of intending to persuade their compatriots to break ranks and rise against the British. The plan was to destroy the British Empire at the time when her armies in India were weakened and dispersed by the exigencies of war and when the grip of the Raj over India had visibly been loosened. However, informers exposed the Ghadr conspiracy before the would-be liberators arrived in India and most of the returning émigrés who intended to free India ended up in jail or were executed. In the conventional British view, these dangerous developments had been precipitated by 'outsiders' who had tried to stir up discontent in what otherwise would have remained the 'peaceful' countryside of the Punjab.

After the war, the British were to take drastic action to ensure the continued loyalty of what they deemed to be the agricultural tribes and castes of the Punjab. However, before they could put their plans into effect, the quiet of the Punjab once again was disrupted in March 1919. Fired by Gandhi's crusade against the Rowlatt Bills, by which the British hoped to keep draconian laws on defence and law and order on the statute books in peacetime, and stirred by the Khilafat campaign in which normally quiescent Punjab Muslims protested against the ending of the Caliphate, urban Punjab marched in frightening and unwonted unison against the British. On 13 April 1919, thousands of protestors gathered in Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar to celebrate Vasakhi and to register their displeasure at the arrests of two prominent Congress men, one Hindu and one Muslim. The meeting contravened an ordinance prohibiting public assembly and, to 'teach them a lesson' and show Punjabis the consequences of disobedience, General Dyer sent in his troops. Four

hundred people were killed in the ensuing bloodbath. But the real casualty of the massacre was any pretence that the Punjab was ruled in the same way as the rest of British India. It became increasingly clear that, in the Punjab, the British would not allow any political disturbance to upset its carefully calibrated policies to keep intact the social and political structure designed to ensure the Punjab countryside's loyalty to the Raj.

When eventually the British had to bring in a measure of reform in the ways in which the Punjab was governed, their tactic within the old strategy was to persuade the province's bigwigs to create a loyalist rural party. Indeed, they tailored the detailed provisions of the Montagu–Chelmsford reforms to suit this particular purpose in the Punjab. The Government of India Act of 1920, as applied to the Punjab, gave a voice to the very same landed interests so long cherished and protected by government. It restricted urban seats to a mere ten of ninety-one seats in the reformed council; in addition it gave five separate seats to landlords in the countryside and communities were given the vote in proportion not to their numbers but to how loyal to the Raj they were deemed to be. For example, every retired serviceman, a considerable number in the Punjab, was given the vote. In cahoots with Punjab officials, the government placed tight restrictions on the requirements of residency in the franchise in order to prevent urban politicians from contesting rural seats. All in all, the new arrangements rewarded those collaborators upon whom the British depended in the Punjab, whether the landed interests, many of whom were Muslim and agricultural Hindu Jats, or of course the Sikhs. As David Page has written, 'Those returned to the Council after 1920, therefore, were men heavily committed to the maintenance of the Punjab military machine.'[39] Two leading political associations, the Punjab Muslim Association and the Punjab Zemindar Central Association, representing the rural landowning class in whom power resided, became the focal point of the new system. Both of these organisations demanded agricultural improvement, increased military recruitment and greater employment for landed people by the government. In due course, Sikander Hyat Khan and Chotthu Ram brought these two associations together to form the Unionist Party, with the avowed aim of defending landowning interests against urban interests. In this way, the loyalty of the Raj's traditional collaborators continued to be secured during the interwar period and urban Punjab was gagged and its influence constrained in the new political arenas created by the Government of India Act of 1920.

Section II: Communism and the Raj

> You require certain definite qualifications to which the ordinary man does not aspire. You do not love your country, you are anti-country, you are anti-God, and you are anti-family. In fact I think it is fair to say that a Bolshevik of unimpeachable character is anti-everything which the normal man considers decent.[40]

> It would be as little justifiable for the Government to relax its vigilance in times of peace as it would be for our health authorities to discard precaution

> when the public health is at its best. Wherever Communism manifests itself it should be met and stamped out like the plague.[41]

After the First World War, the politics of British India and the structures within which they worked were transformed. The Government of India Act, Gandhi's rise to power, the Khilafat movement, the Rowlatt 'satyagraha', the unrest in the Punjab, the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre, the non-cooperation movement which challenged the constitutional and reforming policies of the British, and the fact that relations between the communities were deteriorating,[42] after a brief period of cooperation between Hindu and Muslim political leaders, were all evidence of a rising tide of dissent. However, despite the fact that the politics of every influential group in India, whether nationalist liberals, the Gandhian non-cooperators, the Khilafat movement, the Muslim Leaguers or of course those collaborating politicians who ran the provincial ministries under the Montagu–Chelmsford reforms, had in each and every case little or nothing to do with communism, the British, somewhat perversely, came to view communism as the most dangerous ideology and seditious practice which threatened their rule. In consequence, they sought to insulate the nationalist movement from the radical politics of the left, with what were seen as their dangerous international connections. They also sought to ensure that these politics were criminalised and thus excluded from the legitimate sphere. In this enterprise of combating communism and the politics of the left, the Punjab was seen to be the critical, and strategically the most sensitive, arena.

This book is posited on an attempt to understand British perceptions of communism in India. It provides the key to how government, both at the centre and in the Punjab, tackled communism and the threat of sedition. The Punjab had always been seen as a buffer zone between British India and an expanding Russian empire in central Asia, a region which came to be of even greater strategic importance, from a British point of view, after the Bolsheviks had replaced Russia's Tsarist regime.[43] The perceived communist threat, ideological as well as strategic, must also be placed in the context of widespread labour unrest in India after the war, which led the government to try to improve conditions for organised labour, as part of the larger project of dampening down the radicalism of the left. The Amended Factories Act of 1922 and the Public Safety Bill of 1929 were two sides of a coin, the former designed to improve labour conditions and the latter to keep foreign communists out of India.[44] In this story, the Meerut Conspiracy Case and the prosecution in 1929 of thirty-three persons alleged to be communists for conspiring against the King Emperor was a defining moment, because the prosecution of the Meerut conspirators was the culmination of intensive information gathering by the intelligence service on each and every labour organiser or communist through the 1920s. The prosecution used the entire intelligence archive: detailed reports upon the activities of individual members of the Communist Party, intercepted letters, translations of speeches and even efforts by simple policemen to grapple with the inwardness of communist theory by analysing, *inter alia*, Marx's *Communist Manifesto*[45] and Lenin's *State and Revolution*,[46] a measure of how seriously the British took the communist threat, however inappropriate its measures for tack-

ling it might, in retrospect, have been. The main sources for this section is the evidence collected by the Meerut prosecutors. Interestingly, only three persons from the Punjab were among the thirty-three prosecuted at Meerut. But the case throws light on otherwise little known, and even less well understood, fledgling movements of the left in the Punjab.

During the interwar period, keeping communism at bay in India was a constant preoccupation of the government. Some sectors of Indian industry had done well from the war, benefiting from import substitution. Others did less well. One striking example is that by 1922, the Bombay textile industry had ceased to expand.[47] In consequence, mill owners demanded that tariffs be cut and they introduced 'efficiency schemes' whereby, under cover of offering 'a fair day's wage for a fair day's work',[48] they tried to cut labour costs in their mills. In Bengal, the jute industry faced a different dilemma, with supply exceeding a falling demand. The jute industry reacted by trying to cut its workforce, which was resisted by increasingly organised unions. Significantly the impact of labour activists was felt even in relatively less industrialised regions such as the Punjab. The Punjab witnessed union activity in its railway, motor and wool factories: and among its neighbours, in the United Provinces, Bihar and the Central Provinces, in iron and steel.

These stirrings among the unions gave an edge to official fears that the communists might succeed in capitalising on the grievances of India's workforce.[49] Communists also began to make their presence felt in the political arena. During this period, they operated legally through the front of Workers and Peasant parties, organisations set up by activists who attempted to bring together peasants and workers into regional groupings, with the aim of putting pressure on the government. In these ways, communists tried to influence nationalist leaders and link the cause of the working class with the struggle for independence. When the Simon Commission arrived in India in February 1928, the Bombay Workers and Peasants Party was able to make its mark in the demonstrations and strikes that greeted the Commission. Its party members also were active during the strikes of the railway workers in eastern India at Lillooah and Kharagpur. Even in the relatively undeveloped industries of the Punjab, on 12 April 1928 a mixed bag of groups on the left, consisting of 'ex-*Ghadar* and disillusioned *Akalis*'[50] and the Lahore branch of the Communist Party of India, joined together to form the *Kirti–Kisan* (Workers–Peasants) Party.[51]

The government's response was twofold. In the Punjab it deployed dyarchy to strengthen the hand of its friends and allies by giving them a dominant say in government. It also legislated to improve labour conditions. Significantly, India now became a member of the International Labour Office and passed a flurry of labour laws that included the Amended Factories Act of 1922, the Workman's Compensation Act of 1923, the Trade Unions Act of 1926, the Trades Dispute Act of 1928 and the Maternity Benefits Bill of 1929.[52] But rallying its collaborators and improving the conditions of labour were not seen to be enough. The government also took measures, legal and administrative, to squash any signs of radicalism among labour in British India. Legislation such as the Public Safety Bill of 1929, which was designed to keep foreign communists, including British

Communist Party members, out of the country, the decision to go after its enemies in a number of conspiracy cases – notably the Peshawar, Cawnpore and the Meerut Conspiracy cases – revealed the overtly anti-communist purpose of the new labour laws, echoing the provisions, in the United Kingdom, of Parliament's Trades Union Bill in 1927, which declared general strikes illegal, restricted the right to picket and required all unions to make public their allegiance to political parties.

Communism as sedition

In all colonial regimes, sedition is inevitably a slippery notion. What the imperial factor regarded as sedition, nationalists often saw as the legitimate efforts of a peoples struggling to be free. In India, communism was seen as a particular threat because of its dangerous potential to infect the politics of its subjects with an unwelcome, and irrepressible, radicalism. Before the Meerut Conspiracy Case, the general policy of the British was, according to Kaviraj, to keep 'Communists and Congress at two ends of an eternally renewed misunderstanding'.[53] In 1923, after non-cooperation had been called off, the line taken by the rulers was as follows: 'For special reasons; chiefly the desire to carry with us at a critical stage moderate Indian opinion, the Non-Co-operators were allowed a degree of immunity'. But in contrast the view was that:

> a purely Communist propaganda can work only through a very low class agent, though a fear of the so-called leaders may assist, it will not command the support of large numbers of the respectable classes, and can therefore be more easily suppressed than an agitation on nationalist lines.[54]

So from quite early on, the government treated Gandhian politics and the politics of communism quite differently. As Haig, the Secretary of State for India, explained in a letter to the Chief Prosecutor of the Meerut Case, Langford James:

> from the political point of view it would be an advantage to be able to convince the public in general as early as possible that communism is not the kind of movement that should receive the sympathy of Nationalists. The opposition to the Public Safety Bill has created an artificial and false atmosphere, and we want to set that right as soon as possible.[55]

The government's imperative was so to define legitimate political activities to put politicians linked to the 'red menace' beyond the pale.

Another urgent concern of British policy during these years was to counter, and to squash, what they saw as efforts to awaken the masses. As one official commentator who had reason to report on M. N. Roy wrote:

> The menace of the programme outlined in the following extracts lies not so much in the determination to wage war against the king and to overthrow the

> government established in India, as in the intention to stir up the masses by teaching them that they are oppressed, to create class hatred and eventually to lead the masses to attack on those who are possessed of land or property.[56]

In a sentence, the abiding fear of the British was that the masses might be roused into attacking their propertied allies. In the conventional wisdom of those who saw it as their duty to keep sedition at bay, communists inspired by the Russian Revolution were the big threat. In the classic document of this school of thought, *Communism in India 1924–1927*, by Petrie, it was claimed that communist propaganda had infected the press and was:

> becoming increasingly alive to the immense power of mass action as a political weapon . . . as also the impression that, as this particular weapon broke the dominion of the Tsars in Russia, so it may again be used to win India her freedom from the over-lordship of Great Britain.[57]

The nightmare scenario for those who believed this point of view was that politicians would incite a

> mob, indulging in the kind of mass violence which does not require to be composed of convinced Communists, but only of persons whose mind have been inflamed beyond all control; and Communism is an exceedingly potent and subtle poison for exciting the mob mind in much a way.[58]

In this alarmist analysis, communists were seen as dangerous instigators of violence and the fuglemen of a class struggle which had the capacity fatally to undermine the Raj.

In the Punjab, the local concerns of the administration mirrored worries such as these at the centre. But in one significant respect, the Punjab administration took a line different from that of New Delhi. Rather than understanding, and then exploiting, the very real differences between the politics of the Congress and those of the communists, the Punjab administrators tended to lump the two together and to tar them both with the same brush, seeing Bolshevism behind every manifestation of the political struggle in the Punjab, however remote it was in fact from the communists. Latter-day McCarthyites in the United States could have learnt a thing or two from the paranoia of the Punjab administrators, with reds under every bed.

In the late 1920s, there was, it must be admitted, a palpable increase in terrorist 'outrages' in the province. Officials saw this as positive proof of the 'hydra-headed' nature of the revolutionary movement in the Punjab.[59] Seizing on these outrages as proof positive of the connections between terrorism and communism, one report argued, 'This is not the only indication that, in the Punjab as in the Bengal, there is a definite tendency on the part of terrorists and communists to join forces, or rather, perhaps, to become indistinguishable'.[60] Another report concluded that:

> terrorists in North India are quite prepared to give communist principles their consideration and are studying them carefully. This is very apparent from the nature of the literature demanded (on the pretext that it was wanted for defence) by the accused in the Delhi Conspiracy Case;[61]

and emphatically underlined the connections of 'the terrorist conspiracy in the Punjab . . . with the cult of Communism'.[62] What most worried officials in the Punjab was the impact of sedition on the youth of the province. The corruption of young people was a recurrent concern among the policy-makers of British India;[63] but here too the perspectives of the Punjab government differed from those of the centre. Instead of blaming Moscow, Lahore saw Gandhi and the Indian National Congress as the prime movers of mass politics, whether in the Khilafat, the Akali or the non-cooperation movements, all of which the Mahatma had championed. From this angle of vision, it was Gandhi's role that explains the growing influence of radical politics on ignorant and impressionable peoples, particulary the youth. Even if Congress had let down 'younger men and political hotheads' with its decision to call off non-cooperation after the debacle of Chauri Chaura,[64] it was as much Congress as communism which, from the point of view of Government House in the Punjab, had fuelled the fires of sedition and violence, and 'the seeming failure of mass civil disobedience has brought only added conviction of the efficacy of violence.' It came to be the orthodoxy of the Punjab School that 'the Congress could scarcely shake itself clear of the charges that, both directly and indirectly, it has done much to foster and to stimulate the violence that is now unhappily manifest in so many quarters.'[65]

In 1929, members of a revolutionary terrorist group, the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army, led by Bhagat Singh of the Punjab, threw bombs into the Indian Legislative Assembly. No one was seriously injured, but the pamphlets contained in the bombs which rained down upon the legislators on the very day that they were debating bills on Public Safety and Trade Disputes[66] had a huge symbolic impact. Mainline Congress leaders such as Motilal Nehru applauded Bhagat Singh's action, much to the outrage of Government House. Congress approbation, in the view of the intelligence bureau, served 'to lift violence onto a new plain of respectability as a definite and serious policy which if it was to be ruled out was to be condemned, only on tactical not on moral grounds.'[67] So, from Lahore's perspective, sedition in the Punjab was by no means exclusively a communist phenomenon, but part of a much wider and deeper problem at which nationalist politics, of the Congress and of Gandhi, lay at the core.

Terrorist activities in the Punjab were confined, in the main, to urban areas of the province. But it was the increasing politicisation of the countryside which frightened the Punjab administration most. Civil disobedience in the 1930s, which in the Punjab was primarily the product of activity by members of Workers and Peasant Parties, who happened also to to be members of the Congress, hugely concerned both Lahore and New Delhi: 'At the moment, the Punjab and Calcutta are the chief causes of anxiety.'[68] In mid-June 1930, Brigadier Bannatyre, who commanded the Lahore Brigade, summed up his views of the situation: 'The

popular attitude towards the police and Europeans has definitely become more hostile and the prestige of white man's rule is lessening.'[69] He felt that respect towards the man in uniform, so crucial a factor in keeping the Punjab in line, had fallen to dangerously low levels. Troops were 'seditiously insulted'; 'men in uniform have been seized by Congress parties and forced to shout "Gandhi ki jai"; [where] officers [came to the scene, this was a] signal for every wretched little guttersnipe to sing out "Inquilab zindabad".'[70] Things had changed so much that 'Today it is unpleasant for isolated Europeans to walk down the Anarkali shopping areas in Lahore and on certain days it might be dangerous.'[71] In rural areas, 'Congress efforts to capture the Sikhs are having a measure of success.'[72] Sir Herbert Emerson, the Home Secretary, who had grown grey in the service of the Punjab, expressed similar fears to Sir Harry Haig, the Secretary of State for India: 'There is reason to fear that if the Sikhs who are a very practical and acquisitive community came to believe that the Congress would give them more than Government were able to deliver the goods, that body would obtain many adherents from among them.'[73] This would lead to a 'disquieting success' for Congress, as it would 'gain a footing in rural areas and especially in the districts of the Central Punjab.' With Sikh support, Congress would have the opportunity of 'subverting the rural classes and would supply to its followers a virile and determined character who would be a serious menace to Government.'[74] It is significant how nervous the Punjab government became whenever there was the slightest hint that the Sikhs might be subverted by any political party, whether Congress, communist or Akali. In its view, the Sikhs were the mainstay of British rule in the Punjab, particularly in the countryside, and so protecting their loyalty was of the essence.

Lamenting that 'Even a "salaam" is becoming comparatively rare along the main roads', Brigadier Bannatyre concluded that this antagonism towards the bigwigs and magnates on whom the British relied was caused by the failure to maintain an adequate white presence, civil and military: 'What the village headman wants is NOT paper but actual and personal advice and support.' His discussions with every District Commissioner confirmed his conclusion that giving them more white troops 'wherever and whenever required, [and] the sight of officers and troops and aeroplanes has had a remarkably steadying effect.'[75]

Whatever the differences between officials of the Home Department in New Delhi and the Punjab administrators in Lahore, their perception of the threat of communism had much in common and tended to converge in the incontrovertible conclusion that communist politics was, at the end of the day, seditious. The centre better appreciated the differences between communism and nationalism, whereas Lahore took the rather simplistic line that both were bad and indeed much the same since communists and congressmen alike undermined respect for the British and both threatened to politicise the masses, thereby threatening their neutrality which was a necessary condition of imperial rule. When the Governor of the Punjab, Hailey, explained why four communists including one Punjabi in the Cawnpore Communist Conspiracy Case in 1924 had been prosecuted, he brought into the open the strategy of using the communist threat to alert the people of India

to the dangers of communism and in this way to frighten them into remaining steadfast allies of the Raj.

> As Home Member, I undertook that prosecution, not so much for the sake of punishing the people concerned, three-quarters of whom were really rabbits but in order to warn people in India of what was happening, and if possible, to prove to the Third International and its friends that it was no use wasting money on their agents.[76]

The communist 'alien'

Throughout the official archive on the communists, a recurring and potent theme was the perception of their inherently 'non-Indian nature'. In a typical report, one police agent explained, 'But India is different. Bolshevism is the negation of religion. Bolshevism connotes equality of status. India is the home of caste and feudalism. The doctrines of Communism can never take deep roots in this country.'[77] Communists were seen as peripheral to the core concerns of Indian society, attempting, with their Marxist rhetoric, to mesmerise 'real' Indians. Yet this view begged the question of who the 'real' Indians were and who in fact represented that 'real' India. As Ronald Inden's work suggests, the construct of India by Europeans tended to assume that Indians, with their particular and essential characteristics, whether of caste, or their belief in the divine right of kings or the peculiarities and quiddities of the Indian mind, clashed with what were seen to be the nub, the essence, of western man and his civilisation: individualism, political freedom and inductive reasoning, based on science. In Inden's view, the British saw the people of India as not even possessing 'the capacity on their own to *know* these essences.'[78] From a British standpoint, the 'real Indian' was a person hidebound by religion and caste and rooted in the villages.[79]

A contemporary text that reflects this British view in the 1920s is J. E. Woolacott's *India on Trial*. A former editor of the Anglo-Indian journal *The Pioneer*, Woolacott put forward two themes in his book which constanty recur. First, in an observation somewhat lacking in originality, Woolacott saw India to be a society dominated by religion. Despite religion's capacity to divide and despite the diversity of religions in the subcontinent, which had the potential of sparking off clashes between communities, Indians were, in his view, 'naturally law abiding' and 'highly conservative'.[80] His second theme was that India needed British rule, paternal and enlightened as it was, to achieve social stability and political unity. Labour unrest, he argued, was the work of 'Bolshevik agents and Gandhians alike'.[81] The facts of the matter, as he saw them, showed that the British rule had improved the lot of the workers, the propaganda of 'trouble-makers' notwithstanding. But despite considering them in the main a law-abiding people, Indians, in Woolacott's somewhat self-contradictory view, were a people 'intrinsically violent and ignorant'. It followed that:

> advocates of the improvement of labour conditions in India would do well to bear in mind that rhetorical appeals to the masses are likely to be misunderstood by the men to whom they are addressed. The riots and sabotages which have been the concomitants of recent strikes show how quickly labour disputes in India degenerate into violence.[82]

So it was clear to self-appointed commentators such as these that the situation in India and in Britain was intrinsically, and incorrigibly, different. 'Back home', the government could and did rely on the good sense of the people. As Frederick Isemonger, intelligence officer, explained, 'interference with Communist associations in England is unnecessary so long as members of such associations confine their activity to England where public opinion is sufficiently strong to prevent any serious menace to society.'[83] By contrast, in India, politicians were opportunistic and public opinion was weak; and those few Indian statesmen who had a modicum of sense and responsibility tended to be vilified as being the cause of the country's 'misery and poverty'.[84] India's failings therefore gave no option to the British in their administration but to be paternalistic, not democratic.

In pursuing communists, few though they were, and prosecuting them with all the rigour of the law, the British justified their actions by sticking to a simple line: the communists in India, indeed anywhere in the world, were alien to native society, took their orders from Moscow and imported an ideology and a political strategy which had little to do with conditions on the ground. So when communists in India insisted that class, rather than caste, was the key, analytically and operationally, they were distorting Indian circumstances. From this point of view, communists deserved relentlessly and righteously to be attacked as foreign implants, which ignored the reality that in India and indeed in most other countries as well, the communists had to adapt or perish and were, in every meaningful sense, as Indian as the next man and had to fashion their tactics to the needs of the locality. In dismissing communists in India as moving on strings controlled by puppet-masters in a distant Comintern, administrators and scholars alike have got the facts comprehensively wrong. In its turn this has had a deeply distorting effect not only on policy but also on our historical understanding of the significance of the politics of the left.

Unquestionably, communists in India had strong links with the Soviet Union. But the relationship between them was not as one-sided as has sometimes been assumed and Moscow did not, by any means, always call the shots of its Indian players. In his judgement in the Meerut case, the presiding judge commented on how the communists thought that Russia, post-revolution, was 'marvellous', indeed, 'nothing less than paradise':

> Present day conditions in Russia are described as heavenly compared with conditions in India and the underlying idea conveyed is that the results which have been realized by a Communist Revolution in Russia are likely to be and in fact necessarily will be realized in other countries which follow the same road.[85]

Given this initial and uncritical evaluation by communists of how the 1917 revolution had transformed Tsarist Russia, the fear was that they would want to export similar benefits to India: 'the Bolshevik Government is thoroughly earnest in its hope to provoke revolution in India as the best means of wrecking the British Empire.'[86] But from another perspective, this bogey of the Russian threat to Britain's empire in the east had long historical roots, predating the triumph of communism. Indeed the Bolsheviks moved seamlessly into much the same menacing postures as Tsarist Russia had been seen to have taken towards Britain's imperial position in India and the east. In his Meerut judgement, Yorke made much of the evidence of one publication, *Red Money*. 'There is scarcely a resolution which does not go to prove that the sums sent by the trade unions in Russia . . . were intended to further the hope for proletariat revolution.'[87] It followed that India's communists were trained and financed by the Soviets, by 'the fountain head in Europe' (which was how the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) was described), and this simply leant a factitious credence to the mythology in which Indians were seen to be mere local agents of Moscow's plot to promote Bolshevism internationally. As one lowly CID agent concluded:

> It is doubtful, however, whether the indigenous labour agitator is a Communist at heart. He is ordinarily a man of little education, who has acquired a smattering of Bolshevik theory and who is able to impress the ignorant workers with violent harangues interlarded with the catchwords and slogans employed by the Communist tub-thumper all over the world.[88]

The outlines of the picture which the British had of communism in India had begun to take its familiar shape. It was crude; it was simplistic; it failed to understand the sophistications of theory or the subtleties involved in the translation of that theory into the Indian context. The communist purpose was to encourage revolutions the world over to serve Soviet purposes, seeing 'unlimited revolutionary possibilities' and ways of promoting its own self-interest in the nationalist causes of the colonial world.[89] Indeed, the backing by the Soviet Union of independence movements in the outside world was a deception and a 'lie'. Just how deceptive the communist project was in India, according to this naïve analysis of communism in India by the British, was the perception that in India communism was an adulterated commodity, not the true or 'proper' article.

> The Comintern soon decided not to attempt to foster the projected revolution in India on the milk of pure Communism . . . [as] the first objective of Communism in India was to capture and control existing Nationalist organization such as the Indian National Congress . . . in which a revolutionary spirit might be introduced by means of propaganda.[90]

The inference is clear. The communist project was to capture the organs of nationalism and insidiously pervert them to serve a quite different, and foreign, purpose.

Langford James, the prosecutor, saw communism as the work of a fifth column

determined to overthrow the Raj. Its methods were 'skilful', 'deceitful', 'disguised' and 'likely to rot the core of Government's strength by disaffecting its servants, military and civil, by destroying the influence of the more conservative elements of Indian society through the promotion of a government of dictatorship of the proletariat.'[91] Paradoxically, it followed that the British much preferred 'genuine' nationalism to communism, an assumption that is already found in earlier and favourable comparisons of Gandhi and his non-cooperation campaign with M. N. Roy's dangerous enterprise of 'fostering' communism. In the non-cooperation campaign, Gandhi, so the argument went, had created 'a mass movement which, while resembling nothing in spirit and conception to Communism was far more widespread and formidable than anything Roy could possibly have created.' Gandhi's success was attributed to an appeal based mainly on religion, which was, admittedly, 'anti-British'. Thus, 'with a demi-God like Mr. Gandhi leading the Non-Cooperation Movement there was no one to harken to the purely secular preachings of a puny earthling like Roy.'[92] But the point is that Gandhi's call to religion was seen, in the Indian context, as a legitimate expression of a 'genuine nationalism'; whereas communism was seen to be godless and hence infinitely more dangerous. In his introductory speech at Meerut, Langford James showed the hand of the prosecution: he intended to prove that the communists in the dock were an altogether different political animal from nationalist politicians.

> The Communists do not belong to this country. Their cause is not the nationalist cause. The Communist is the interloper who is out to destruct and manipulate the just cause of nationalism in order to create a satellite state of the USSR.[93]

This notion of the communist as outsider came to be a stock in trade of the 'official mind' of the Punjab, echoing fears of a decade or more ago that agitation was the work of outside forces and this was the real threat to the peace and quiet in a province where security was of the essence. Such concerns had been at the root of British nervousness about the Punjab during the war and in its turbulent aftermath. The Rowlatt Bills, Jallianwala Bagh and martial law in the Punjab were all part and parcel of a reaction which flowed from a conviction that the Punjab was at risk, whether from the revolutionary infection of young Muslims who had fought in Turkey, Sikhs of the Ghadr persuasion, or now, above all, the communists under Bolshevik sway.

Yet the inwardness of communism in the Punjab and its relationship to British perceptions of what it really meant is deeply complex and in some ways rather paradoxical. It suited the British to dismiss communism in the Punjab as alien to the traditions of the province. But in the Punjab a resort to arms to resolve political conflict was a practice very much in the province's good old martial traditions. Indeed, the British perception of what distinguished Punjabis from other Indians was founded specifically on their martial qualities. Terrorist activity, from another point of view, could have been seen as an expression of these very qualities, albeit outside the disciplined carapace of armed forces loyal to the state; and terrorism,

particularly in the nationalist forms with which the communists had such close connections in the Punjab, was thus deeply rooted in local religion and custom, not in some alien, atheistic culture. So the main premise of the imperial thesis that communists were not native to India or to the Punjab was not as convincing an argument as the British tried to persuade themselves and their Indian allies that it was. It had within it fundamental contradictions which, in the last resort, made unsafe and insecure the strategy by which communism was to be tackled and suppressed, namely an appeal to traditional India, its religion and civilisation.

The 'Red Menace', in British stereotypes, came to be equated with 'sedition', an alien import, foreign to Indian norms in which religion had pride of place. The fact that communists were atheists was, in this context, its Achilles heel, which the British and their Indian allies were determined to exploit and attach. As seditious, 'un-Indian' and godless people, the communists, in the eyes of the British beholder, were the antithesis of civilisation and called to be shown up as such to their Indian friends and allies. But there was a certain irony, and also a huge element of internal contradiction, in this British approach. After all, the British themselves were foreigners in India and their religion was not, in the main, the religion of their Indian subjects: a white kettle calling the communist pot black.

Communism as atheism

Communism was seen to be a menace not just to the political institutions of British rule in India but to India's essential customs and traditions. Communists were deemed to be different and apart from ordinary people; deceitful, immoral and above all, atheistic. As such, they threatened the very fabric of Indian society. As Langford James's prosecution address reveals, rejecting God put communism and communists, in British eyes, beyond the pale. It also suggests that the colonial power, its Christian and evangelical purposes notwithstanding, thought it had potentially a powerful common cause with its deeply religious Indian subjects, capable of forging alliances and launching a joint assault upon the atheism of godless communism. This led easily to the next step, which was to claim that the British and Indians alike shared a 'universal' morality, couched in terms of a common set of 'ideals of civilization', a conscious appeal to the intelligentsia and the notables in Indian society.[94] Horton, an intelligence officer who had collated and analysed most of the evidence deployed by the prosecution at Meerut, saw in Lenin's theory of class a clear message:

> The only other class (apart from the proletariat class) for which Lenin designed his appeal was that of the 'intellectuals', revolutionary theorists, dazzled by the counterfeit brilliance of their own intellects and devoted to the perversion of the *accepted ideals of civilization.*[95]

The big question, of course, is what constituted the 'accepted ideals of civilization' which Horton had in mind. Were they Indian, British or, more probably, some amalgamation of the two which implied a common interest among the 'decent' classes of both 'civilizations', British and Indian alike, to join together in

resisting the siren calls of 'malicious' intellectuals to a destitute and impressionable proletariat?

In Meerut, Langford James took it upon himself to reject Marx and his theory of the state by contrasting it with the common sense of 'the man in the street':

> I suppose any ordinary person who thinks about the state regards it as an institution which for better or for worse, well or less well, is there to guard the liberties and rights of all citizens in the state and see to the best of its ability that they all get fair pay and equal treatment.[96]

In James's portrayal of the Soviet Union, where he argued that Marx's theories had been taken to 'brutal and extreme conclusions', the dangers of communism to the 'civilized' classes of India were emphatically clear. Moreover, as James pointedly added:

> it is not a fact that Russia is a happy land peopled by Communists. It is a fact that it is ruled by Communists with the help of the OGPU [State Political Directorate or secret police] and the Red Army . . . [where] the people of the country are terrorized into submission to the rule which is imposed upon them.

So it was the simple and undeniable duty of the Raj to protect Indians from the fate which the dictatorship of the proletariat involved. 'Incompatible with freedom for the bourgeoisie',[97] the dictatorship of the proletariat would entail the death of liberal (and national) India. Addressing India's 'civilised' audiences was the chief prosecutor's purpose when he argued:

> In the event of the overthrow by force of arms of the British government, the revolutionaries proposed to sweep away all political groups and labour organizations which didn't come into line. The power of the *upper and middle class Indians* was to be destroyed by taking from them all that they possessed.[98]

The thrust of the argument was reinforced by portraying the communists as violent agitators in contrast to Gandhian strategies of passive resistance, non-violence and *ahimsa*. Lenin was quoted liberally to underline how committed to violence the communists were; and Marxist texts, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and *The Civil War in France*, were also used to show how communists glorified violent revolution. Bomb-making was described a core purpose of communist cadres.[99] The roles envisaged for labour unions in the Second International, based in Amsterdam, and in the Third International, a Moscow-run affair, were contrasted and compared. As Langford James stated:

> to be Amsterdamed means that you hold rational feelings with regard to the labour question and rationalization is one of the hated things in the Communist International. I want to put this as fairly as possible. I suppose

> it may be said that this Amsterdam International aims at the constitutional methods whereas the Third International holds most strongly that no such method is possible.[100]

Here, the term 'rational' was equated with the willingness to use constitutional means to achieve political transformation, glossing over the fact that in the Indian context constitutional 'norms' were decided by the Raj. In consequence, 'rational' politics meant accepting the structures and the rulers laid down by the British. But the project of these apologists of the Raj was to claim a conformity of interest between Britain and India on the question of labour and indeed on the iniquities of the class struggle more generally. The alternative to communism, so it was argued, was cooperation between employers and workers and collaboration between all the classes to achieve the general welfare of the people. The 'impartial, decent' citizen of the middling class was the focus of this appeal by the Guardians of the Punjab in their post-war setting.

For them, nothing communists did was right or capable of being justified in any way. If they used secret codes, invisible ink, false passports and fake pretexts in order to enter British Indian territory, this proved that they were outlaws and subverters, up to no good, ignoring the obvious point that these were the only ways the communists, who were proscribed, could get into India. The statement that 'No communist comes out here exactly in a free or overboard manner. They either change their names or they at any rate throw some doubts upon their occupations',[101] was a naïve attempt to brand them as sly and deceitful when in fact they had no choice but to act by stealth. Damned on every count as bad and dangerous to the health of the Indian polity, communists were described as fanatics determined to pervert the cause of nationalism, usurp the property of the wealthy, set the workers against their employers and indoctrinate impressionable youth against their elders and betters, all in the enterprise of achieving purposes which were deeply dangerous and wholly unacceptable.

This caricature of communism meant that the Meerut case came to be seen as a battleground for the hearts and minds of the most vulnerable, the most emotional, segments of Indian society, the young firebrands who had more heart than mind. It was this dangerous and growing 'corruption' of the youth which officials feared most. Reports typically entitled 'The Growth of the Spirit of Violence' underline the fear among India's masters that they would lose the fight to keep India's youth on the straight and narrow paths of moderation and good sense unless the virus of communism was eradicated. Increasingly, the perception was that 'the spirit of violence has permeated and gripped the educated youth of India',[102] and something urgently had to be done to extirpate this virus.

The picture they painted was that the Raj was on the verge of losing the Punjab's youth to the enemy. Not only had 'indiscipline and the loosening of parental control' got out of hand, but far more insidious was the dangerous 'fact' that a 'spirit of irreligiousness is becoming increasingly manifest'.[103] A report entitled 'The Psychology of the Youth Movement' stated that some fifty prominent citizens, alarmed at the new attitudes of the young, had claimed, 'These youths are associ-

ated with the Congress, and have more than once gone out of their way to disturb peaceful religious gatherings. They have publicly abused moulvis and pundit, the Vedas and the Qoran.'[104] Although 'patriotism and honest nationalism' was all well and good, revolutionary attitudes, overlaid with hostility towards religion, were 'bound to offend the entire Indian population'.[105]

So the medium and the message now came together into one clear conclusion. The Raj decided to cast its appeal to its Indian friends and allies in terms of shared values of decency and morality, not just the need to face a common political enemy. The future of India as a healthy society was at stake and all good citizens, rulers and ruled alike, had to join together to root out this evil which threatened everything which was good and normal and right and proper in India. Quoting Langford James yet again:

> You require certain definite qualifications to which the ordinary man does not aspire. You do not love your country, you are anti-country, you are anti-God, and you are anti-family. In fact I think it is fair to say that a Bolshevik of unimpeachable character is anti-everything which the normal man considers decent.[106]

In a few dramatic sentences, everything that was seen to be negative and destructive in communism, whether its rejection of love and its utter contempt for normality, was condemned out of hand. Bolshevism was the 'Gospel of the anti-God'; it encouraged 'a rule of life' that created fanatical disciples such as Philip Spratt, with his enterprise of blowing up India. When in his defence, Spratt stated that 'I didn't think what I was doing is illegal,' Yorke retorted that 'It is a curious explanation to put forward and is only understandable in the light of a fanatical belief in Communism which renders a man completely unable to judge things from an ordinary standpoint.'[107] Fanaticism and communism had become synonymous in British eyes. Communists, whether opportunistic politicians or 'satanical' agents of Moscow, were unscrupulous, ready to use 'any means necessary' to achieve their evil purposes.

> Lying and deceit are often very important weapon to the pupils of Lenin . . . That is to say that in the class struggle any means, however immoral according to bourgeois ideas are right and proper from the point of view of a Communist. One colossal immoral act is to produce a state of affairs in which there will be no more need for any immoral acts, or in which as everybody will be on equal terms, immoral acts will no longer be justifiable.[108]

Conclusion

This section has used the Meerut Conspiracy Case as an example to illustrate colonial thinking about communism in India. It made political sense for the British to decry notions of class struggle as a foreign and immoral, and altogether antithetical to the very essence of India. This is what was seen to justify

the extremely severe reaction, indeed overreaction, of the British to a relatively minor conspiracy. Communism was seen as a threat to the very stability of the empire. But this view, indirectly, helped to improve the prospects of nationalist politicians since Gandhi and his supporters had, by contrast, to be given a measure of legitimacy by their rulers. Significantly, the Gandhian use of religion was seen by the British as preferable to the atheism of the communists. The radical and communist left were condemned, not least in the Punjab, as the antithesis of normal, decent social values. The official line in the Punjab was that government had constantly and consistently to show that it was strong and that its authority could not be challenged with impunity. This, the Punjab administrators believed, was the only policy that the 'virile' races of their province, crude and unsophisticated as they were and only understanding force and discipline, could appreciate. This was the thinking that led to the banning, in September 1934 of five key communist organisations, a measure designed to show that the government was again, incontrovertibly in charge.

Yet in comparison with their presence and impact upon other industrial centres in British India, in particular Bombay and Calcutta, communists and socialists in the Punjab were, relatively speaking, small fry who hardly stirred the waters of this land of five rivers. However great the importance they were accorded by the Punjab government, this reflects the particular and deep-rooted paranoia of that government and the special role that the left played in British thinking, not how strong or influential they actually were; and these reflections illuminate issues which go well beyond the Punjab.

2 Martyrdom and the nation

The ‘communism’ of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha

The story of Punjab politics cannot be written solely from the perspectives of the rulers or even of their Indian collaborators. It has to explore politics outside the mainstream and enter zones of thinking and activity which were neither white nor black. The extremist politics of the radical left inhabit this grey area; and an understanding of them throws light on what was happening on rather more prominent stages and in much better-known arenas. In the Punjab, the 1920s saw communist and socialist activity whose dangers have been hugely exaggerated but whose significance is nevertheless not insubstantial. When Ghulam Husain[1] was arrested as a key figure in the Cawnpore Conspiracy Case in 1924, the ripples of the Russian Revolution had already reached a distant Punjab, and had an impact not only through reports in the press but by word of mouth, whether from accounts of servicemen who returned home after the war, or from the graphic reports of muhajirs who had fought for Turkey against the British.[2]

Another significant element in the radical politics of the Punjab was the attempt by some Sikhs to define and promote their distinct religious identity, which led to many Sikh leaders being sent to jail. A splinter group, the Babbar Akalis, renounced the strategies of mainstream Akalis (which tended to eschew violence) from whom they had broken away and instead they now advocated that village leaders, especially in central Punjab, who were seen to be loyal to the British, be killed. Their leader, Mota Singh, an ally of the Ghadr Sikhs, dressed up this campaign of assassination with socialist rhetoric. However, the Babbar Akalis were rounded up in 1925 and their leaders were imprisoned or hanged by the British.[3] But the important milestone in the politics of the left in the Punjab was the formation of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha in 1926. Most of the people who came to lead the left in the Punjab were to sharpen their cub teeth in the Sabha, the most notorious of the Punjab’s radical organisations in the twentieth century. Its young leader, Bhagat Singh, has been immortalised as the true hero of the modern Punjab, an iconic figure who rose above the petty factions among those who competed to be the voice of communism in the province. Many histories of the Sabha have been written, underlining its importance, as much symbolic as actual, to the development of most radical groups in the Punjab. Even today, Bhagat Singh has a vivid presence in Indian folklore: for example, on the internet, he is depicted as both

a Jat hero and a Sikh nationalist. Even the Arya Samaj, a Hindu reforming sect, claims him as one of its own on the flimsy grounds that he had studied for a while at an Arya Samaj school. Nationalist historians celebrate Bhagat Singh as a larger than life figure in the pantheon of national martyrs; and he is still venerated by all three of the largest communist parties in India.[4] The huge crowds which thronged to a recent exhibition at the Nehru Memorial Museum in Delhi in November 2008 celebrating his life and martyrdom underline just how powerfully Bhagat Singh has captured the imagination of contemporary India. When Bhagat Singh was hanged, and then indecently cremated by having his corpse doused with petrol, this provoked widespread outrage, and not simply in the Punjab. Despite his being an atheist, the fact that he had been denied the traditional religious rites caused huge resent among Hindu nationalists, and to this day there are plans to erect a temple in his memory at the site of his summary execution.[5]

The Naujawan Bharat Sabha conforms to no stereotypes of other leftist organisations in India. For it to have done so would have required it to adhere to Marxist doctrine, concentrate on organising workers or peasants and possess a committed and unquestioning cadre of disciplined followers. It had none of these characteristics. In the view of the Punjab's rulers, the Sabha seemed, instead, more akin to a terrorist than a run-of-the-mill communist organisation. Yet it was its very idiosyncrasies and peculiarities that enabled the Sabha to capture the imagination of such a wide spectrum of radical opinion in the Punjab. By consciously claiming to provide an alternative to the Gandhian way and by condemning communalism, it pioneered that curious mix of idealism and pragmatism which has been the hallmark of movements of the left in India, particularly in the Punjab. Such movements have prided themselves on having an international view of the world, on their ability to raise their eyes above the petty concerns of the parish-pump, while nevertheless addressing the mundane problems of their local constituents. Primarily a student body, the Sabha's declared mission was to represent workers and peasants in town and country; and this required their message to be cast in a language with which Punjabi audiences could identify. So, for example, on more than one occasion, the Sabha had to temper its secular stance with religious symbolism that took account of the strong communal prejudices which were a fact of life in the Punjab.

During the late 1920s, the Naujawan Bharat Sabha came to represent not only the left but also some significant elements among the nationalists of the Punjab. Indeed the efforts of the Sabha, and the pressure of like-minded radicals elsewhere in the country, played some part in persuading Congress to adopt the resolution by which it demanded full independence for India in Lahore in 1929. In some ways, the Naujawan Bharat Sabha, with all its peculiar features and the particular dilemmas it faced, was a mirror of nationalism in India. Its members saw themselves as international socialists at the same time as being Indian and Punjabi; and the way they combined into one of the three crucial elements which were seen to constitute a Punjabi and to make him who he was came to be equated with communism. None of this was in line with communist orthodoxy but the

Naujawan Bharat Sabha was the first substantial manifestation of communism in the Punjab which had an enduring impact on its politics.

But assessing its background is a necessary prolegomenon to understanding the Sabha. It was established in March 1926 by a leader of the Punjab Congress movement, Dr Satyapal, in order to 'educate young men, especially the students of the Lahore colleges, in extremist politics.'[6] Satyapal first made his mark in March 1919, when he organised strikes in Amritsar during the Rowlatt agitations and was deported for his pains. His arrest, and that of his Congress comrade in arms, Dr Saifuddin Kitchlew, triggered a widespread protest which culminated in the notorious bloodbath in Jallianwala Bagh on 13 April 1919. Seven years later, Dr Satyapal tried to inject life into the moribund Congress movement in the Punjab, which was wilting under Lajpat Rai's increasingly feeble leadership. Both Lajpat Rai and Satyapal were ill at ease with Gandhi's dominant role in the Congress. After Gandhi suspended non-cooperation in 1922, Lajpat Rai set up the Congress Independent Party. However, Lajpat Rai's links with the Hindu Mahasabha, which was an avowedly communal organisation, tarred the new party's image, since it was thought to be an organisation intended to promote the interests of Hindus alone. As for Satyapal's motives in organising the Naujawan Bharat Sabha, Government House saw it as a factional move to win back Congress supporters in the Punjab from Lajpat Rai and his new party, but a tactic which seemed to have backfired when the students he was attempting to enlist showed they had minds of their own when they dared to heckle the Punjab's elders at public meetings.[7]

Many of the leading activists of the Sabha had been radicalised in their teens by the non-cooperation movement but, like so many young Congress enthusiasts, had felt hugely let down by Gandhi when he abruptly called off the agitation after the burning of the twenty-two hapless constables at Chauri Chaura. That Gandhi's actions in 1922 deeply affected an entire generation of India's youth can be seen in innumerable autobiographies and personal memoirs.[8] Three years before, the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh had been another critical event in the radicalisation of India's youth. The notorious 'crawling order' under martial law, which required respectable citizens of Amritsar to get down on their bellies and crawl on all fours through their own streets, persuaded many proud young men of the province that they had to avenge the humiliation of their fathers.[9]

Although the members of the Sabha were students from urban Punjab, their roots were mainly rural. Many, for example Yashpal had been sent to town to get an education, or they were scions of families which not long ago had migrated to the cities from the countryside to better themselves. Bhagat Singh's father, Kishen Singh, was an insurance clerk. His comrade (and future biographer), Ram Chandra, was the son of a small businessman and moneylender. Sukhdev, who had the distinction of being hanged alongside Bhagat Singh, was the nephew of a grain merchant. Their personal backgrounds epitomised the radical project of trying to straddle the political terrain between village and town, in addition to their own grander enterprise of reconciling, in politics and ideology, the needs of the province and those of the Indian nation with the changing international order.

The members of the Sabha, consciously and publicly, renounced caste practices

and rituals, some more easily than others because most of them were Jats, used to eating *langar* (charitable food) in gurdwaras where persons of all castes sat together. But it was also a practice of which they made much because they wanted to stress just how secular their politics were. Their collective biographies suggest that they were strongly influenced by the Arya Samaj; many of them studied at Dayanand Anglo-Vedic (DAV) schools or came from Arya Samaj families.[10] Of course, there is no direct or simple line of connection between the teaching of the Arya Samaj and the political predilections of these student radicals. But one guiding principle of the Arya Samaj was the rejection of the traditional Hindu adherence to the hierarchy of caste.[11] Another was its celebration of celibacy, as a way of showing that human frailty and desires could be overcome. Another was the high esteem in which education and learning were held, particularly the teachers or gurus who had sacrificed their own family lives in order to teach others. Lala Hans Raj, the first principal of the Lahore DAV, was famous for having taught for two years without pay. These were the ideals which inspired the system in the Arya Samaj's Gurukula school, which opened its doors in 1903. Also important were the more subtle ways in which the Arya Samaj and its practices reinforced the received culture of these young students and had a profound influence on their politics. The gurukul system of learning, whereby the teacher or guru had a special relationship with his pupils,[12] was echoed in the Sabha's organisational structures. In the Naujawan Bharat Sabha, an elite core, based in Lahore, which included the inner cell that organised terrorist 'outrages', and controlled 'junior' members, reflected the *guru–shishya* (teacher–student) relationship prescribed by the gurukul system. The Sabha's members were, thus, a far cry from stereotypical Jats,[13] sturdy agriculturalists who despised book learning and whose babies, legend has it, were given 'a plough-handle to play with' while still in their cradles.[14]

Many of the young radicals whose paths converged when they joined the Sabha had studied at the National College in Lahore, which Lala Lajpat Rai had recently started in 1921. At this college, Jaychandra Vidyalankar, a charismatic lecturer, who taught Indian history, but also spoke about the French revolution and told stirring tales about other movements for independence in other countries, changed the worldview of his pupils.[15] The brother of a member of the Hindustan Republican Army, Jaychandra tended to pick out a few favourites from his students, such as Bhagat Singh, lending them books on Marxism and anarchism from his own library, making them feel special, the chosen few, who were being tutored to leave their footprints upon the sands of time.[16] This new group – the Naujawan Bharat Sabha, which literally translated means the 'Indian Youth Association' – was led by Bhagat Singh, already a marked man in the eyes of the Punjab intelligence, since his uncle had led the agitation against canal rates in 1907 and, in consequence had been 'externed' from the Punjab. Bhagat Singh's father had also been arrested during the Rowlatt agitation. As he came from a family of known troublemakers, the police already had this young firebrand in their sights. As one informant reported at the end of September 1926:

> A new association has recently come into being in Lahore under the name of . . . 'Tarun Bharat Sangha' or Naujawan Bharat Sanhga' with one Bhagat

> Singh as Secretary. The latter is extremely secretive as to the real objects of the Society, but it is known that members are requested to accept the published constitution to sign a pledge to the effect that they will remain above communal and religious ties and will serve the Motherland. The fact that Bhagat Singh is the Secretary does not assure one as to the ulterior objects of the Sangh. Bhagat Singh, who is the nephew of the notorious Ajit Singh, was recently reported to have been at one time associated with Sachin Sanyal, and he is known to be connected to Bengal, Benares and Cawnpore.[17]

In its early years, the Sabha maintained a relatively low profile, its only reported agitation being a small public demonstration in September 1926. As the police could see, this was a relatively innocuous protest.

> A society of youths of the extremist Congress persuasion known as the NJBS, or Young India Association, was recently formed at Lahore. At a public meeting convened by this society on the 14th September the exhibition of a part of Indian jugglers in the Berlin Zoological Gardens by Karl Hagenbeck was condemned in very vigorous language and great sympathy was expressed with the under trial prisoners in the Kakori Train Dacoity case.[18]

However, this formative period was deployed by the small group which organised the Sabha to consolidate its position amongst fellow student radicals in Lahore and Amritsar. Most of its members had already been active in the various political campaigns of the Punjab such as the Khilafat, Akali and Non-Cooperation movements; and it is evident that the Naujawan Bharat Sabha was driven by the deep disillusionment of this generation of young men with the Congress under Gandhi's leadership, which had promised swaraj, or home rule, in a year, and then reneged and resisted on its promise as soon as the movement appeared to run out of the control of its leaders.

At this time, the Punjab was in a period of transition. Just how fluid the situation was illustrated by the awesome statistic that the population of Lahore had expanded by nearly 80 per cent in the past four decades. Education, too, had increased by leaps and bounds, as the rapid growth of new schools and colleges in the province demonstrates. By 1928, the Sabha had taken advantage of this flux and had developed in two distinct and quite different ways. First, it had set up a secret wing, the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army, a militia ready to deploy terrorist tactics to advance its agenda. Its roots lay in an earlier Hindustan Republican Army, a terrorist organisation founded in the United Provinces in 1923 by Sachindra Sanyal, a veteran from Bengal who had made Benares his home, and by Jogesh Chandra Chatterjee from Dacca. This Hindustan Republican Army had links with members of the old Ghadr Party.[19] After trying to organise the Ghadrs in 1915, Sanyal, together with other revolutionaries, had been arrested and jailed and had ended up in the penal colony of the Andamans. After the police foiled an attempted hold-up of a train, which led to most of its members being rounded up and sent to jail, the Hindustan Republican Army was smashed. In 1928, the few surviving remnants of that army, and a handful of younger recruits,

met in Delhi to revive the militia, giving it a new name, the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army, with Chandrashekar Azad as its commander-in-chief and the young firebrand Bhagat Singh being designated as the leader of the Punjab cohort. Indeed it was Bhagat Singh who insisted that 'Socialist' be added to the Army's name, firmly linking the militant tradition to the prospectus of the new left.

A second development was the Sabha's effort to afforce its student base by enlisting the support of groups which shared the socialist ideology of the Sabha, such as members of the Communist Party of India, the Kirti–Kisan (Workers and Peasants) group and Ghadr veterans. Their main ally on the left, however, was Sohan Singh Josh. Once a deeply religious man, Josh had received his political baptism during the Sikh Akali movement, which was active in the cities of the Punjab from 1920 to 1925.[20] In the late 1920s, when Josh emerged from jail, he was a confirmed communist, and was to become a leader of the Communist Party and the Kirti–Kisan Party.[21] Josh was approached by Bhagat Singh to help him gather support for the Naujawan Bharat Sabha. Although Josh was unpersuaded by how effective terrorism was likely to be in achieving the aims they shared, he promised young Bhagat Singh to help the Sabha with Communist Party funds; and in July 1928 he also agreed to become the leader of the movement at its Amritsar base.[22] He also used *Kirti*, the newspaper of the Kirti–Kisan Party, to promulgate the Sabha's message. Kedar Nath Sehgal and Abdul Majid were two other communists who were active in the Sabha, but they came from very different backgrounds. Sehgal had belonged to a Hindu reformist sect (the Arya Samaj), whereas Majid's communism was a product of his travels as a Muhajir across Afghanistan to the Soviet Union, a commitment which had been strengthened by his involvement in trade union activity in the Punjab. The Sabha now invited veterans of the Ghadr and Babbar Akali movements to its meetings. By working through existing radical networks, the Sabha's student leaders were able to raise sufficient funds to print a number of revolutionary pamphlets. In 1929, a list of its cadres showed that they had recruited 200 members to the inner core of the Sabha and the general membership had increased to about 5000.[23]

The Sabha's leaders, with this not insubstantial body of followers, now planned to propagate their message through both wings of the movement, covert and overt, militant and political. For a brief moment in time, they created a common platform on which communists, socialists and nationalists, of many hues, met and forged a (temporary) political alliance, broadly based on what they saw to be Marxism. Yet Marxist ideology, however persuasive, to some persons with leftist leanings, was not only foreign to the Punjab of the 1920s, but was also, in its modern guise, the product of a particular country, the Soviet Union, with which the Punjab did not have any especial ties. Yet the Naujawan Bharat Sabha, with the raw confidence of untutored youth, engageed with this foreign ideology and deployed its concepts and political agendas in order that they made sense to their fellow Punjabis. A particular target of the Sabha was the students of Lahore. In an attempt to win them over, they were wooed by many 'celebrities' with revolutionary credentials. One was Bhai Parmanand, a self avowed terrorist, who had helped to found the Ghadr party in San Francisco and had spent five years in the notorious Cellular Jail of the Andamans.[24] Another young man, whose visits agitated the Punjab's police, was

Subhas Chandra Bose, a rising Congress star from Bengal to whom the baton of leadership was to be passed by the great Chittaranjan Das, who 'remind[ed] the teachers that the French Revolution was brought about by those who had gone and preached among the masses.'[25] Another visiting firebrand, Keshava Deva Sastri, one of the founders of the India Home Rule League in America, 'referred to the achievements of Lenin, Zaghlul Pasha, Kemal Pasha and Mussolini in their respective countries and asserted that if the youths of India were organized they could do likewise.'[26] Bhupindra Nath Dutt, brother of the famous Swami Vivekananda and former editor of the revolutionary Bengali newspaper *Jugantar*, rammed home for the benefit of students in the Punjab the lessons they could learn from what their compatriots in Bengal had achieved in 1907 and again in 1914,[27] while the railway union leader, Shamsuddin Hassan, told them about the youth movement of faraway China, which, he suggested, 'had been responsible for the awakening in that country and how, through the youth[s,] the people of China had been emboldened to oppose Imperialist powers.'[28] In another speech, delivered to an audience of 5000 or more students, Subash Chandra Bose exhorted the young men of Punjab to think, feel and act as free men, not as slaves. With typical hyperbole and with little awareness of the risks of getting the untutored to swim in storm-tossed seas, he urged that: 'they must be thoroughly intoxicated with the wine of freedom and must plunge into an ocean of activity.'[29]

These luminaries exhorted the young men of the Punjab to study the history of resistance in other places and in other times to learn about nation formation, and to take heed of the example of its legendary figures, whether Voltaire, Mazzini or Sun Yat Sen, and imitate them so their own endeavours in the Punjab could be linked to the great, and ever stronger, chain of revolutionary tradition. This agenda clearly rejected any notion of India being a special case, with unique ways of its own, distinct from the revolutions of other peoples in other parts of the world. Since India was not, in their view, *sui generis*, its people could not ignore models abroad in mapping their own future.

> Mother India is today seized of the White Terror and crying out to her sons and her daughters who are young both in age and heart to relieve her of this death embrace. Now, it is for young men and women of India to decide whether you will stand aside and watch the humiliations that are being piled upon your countrymen day and night or whether you will shake off the lethargy and spirit of inaction that has got hold of you . . . To be more frank it shall be necessary for you to organize in small secret groups of five or six and devote yourselves to the study of revolutionary literature, which should include historical revolutionary movements in the different countries of the world, eg. Italy, Ireland, Turkey, China and Russia. A study of their history shall reveal to you how the struggle for freedom was launched and carried on in those countries. Then and then alone it shall be possible to disabuse your mind of the mischievous notion that the position of India is unique in the history of the world in this direction and that the means which were employed in other countries to achieve their freedom cannot be found useful in this

> country. In fact this is a part of the propaganda of lies that the British and their henchmen carry on to keep us away from a true realisation of our position.[30]

Writings and speeches along these lines encouraged the young radicals of the Punjab to raise their eyes and become aware of distant political horizons well beyond the borders of their province or indeed of India itself. Their history, they were told, was part of the glorious annals of revolution through the ages. The fact that their attention was drawn to events in places as different as China and Ireland, which in very different contexts and in very different ways had challenged the British, brought the culturally distant notions of communism closer to home and made them more relevant to India's circumstances and those of the Punjab. Yet at the same time these masters of rhetoric also drew on more local and familiar histories, the tropes of Punjabi custom and traditions. After all, Punjabis were brought up to believe that they had a long and proud history of their own in which they had bravely resisted alien aggressors and the students of contemporary Punjab were exhorted to learn from their own traditions and to emulate the great men of their own past.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s another refrain in these speeches, in Urdu and Punjabi, of leaders of the radical left – one that the British considered to be particularly dangerous and seditious – was that India, by being one of the Allies in the Great War, had brought shame to its people. One pamphlet entitled 'The Dacoits made away with Plunder – Oh Youths! Prove your Existence!' told its readers: 'You are looked down upon by the world; yes, yes, you are the beggars in the bazaar of liberty.'[31] Ever since the Mutiny, the British had recruited martial Punjabis in large numbers to their armies.[32] Now Abdul Majid and his comrades argued that this special Punjabi relationship with the armies of their oppressors far from being a glorious matter of pride, rather was a badge of dishonour, of shame and degradation.[33] By fighting for the Allies, Indians and Punjabis in particular were helping imperialism to survive and had contributed not only to India's continuing servitude, but to the enslavement of other subject people by the west. This, Abdul Majid claimed, was why Punjabis in the armies of British India had reason to hang down their heads. The thin material pickings they received in pay, pensions and land by colluding with colonialism and being its mercenary agents made their role even more ignominious.[34] Abdul Majid implored Punjabis to 'try to wipe off this old brand – a brand which was put on our foreheads and which people read wherever we go. For this reason we should not participate in any war in future and should not render any sort of assistance.'[35] The Punjab's record in the First World War of providing almost 350,000 combatant troops to the armies of British India was now described not as a reason for the Punjab to hold high its head in pride but as a betrayal of their countrymen, a cause for shame, humiliation, regret, repentance and a change in attitude: boycotting the armies of their oppressors. This challenge to the proud military heritage of the Punjab was one of the most significant changes the radicals helped to bring about in less than a decade after the ending of the Great War.

Deploying popular religion, writers in the Kirti–Kisan Party's organ, *Kirti*, sought to create a new book of martyrs for their new nation by drawing on power-

ful, if latent, religious traditions of the past. Their line was that a nation's future depended on its respect, and recognition, for martyrs in the national cause.[36] As popular Hinduism taught, every action has a reaction and a consequence, and the vocabulary of these writers reveals the religious roots of their message, for example when they described the Babbar Akali movement in these terms:

> I have come here not to learn propaganda work from you people but to learn how the brethren of Doaba attain martyrdom . . . the martyrs who staked for liberty all they had with them, mounted the gallows and laid down their lives for the sake of the ideal they had placed before them. Praise be to the sisters who gave birth to them. This occurs in our minds and our leaders say that it was the Babbar Akali movement which made the Gurdwara movement successful.[37]

Speakers such as Josh thus played upon his audience's familiarity with traditions of Sikh martyrdom as well as with the recent history of Sikh revivalism and Akali rebellion.[38] Their aim was to identify a common ground, the base from which a campaign rooted in Punjabi traditions and the new appeals of communism could be combined in a joint assault upon the British. Marx himself had pride of place in Sohan Singh Josh's pantheon of those who had made significant sacrifices in the cause of revolution. Giving a novel twist to an old story, Josh told it in this way:

> Karl Marx started this movement. He had been passing his life in securing bread for the poor people. The German Government offered to give him the higher posts several times but he refused to accept them and said that in order to provide happiness in the world it was necessary that some people should be in distress. Happiness cannot prevail over the world unless some persons become martyrs for the sufferings of the people.[39]

In this account, Marx is presented, unusually, as a renouncer in the Hindu tradition.[40] He was a martyr who had sacrificed worldly rewards for the sake of improving society. Young Punjabi men, with degrees but no employment and restless under the heavy hand of the Punjab School of administration, were invited to see parallels between a saintly Marx according to the gospel of Sohan Singh Josh and their own local predicaments and choices. Communism was presented to them as a means of emulating Marx's sufferings, forsaking, as he had done, government or other gainful employment to 'provide happiness' to a suffering world.

By April 1929, Bhagat Singh had killed a policeman, thrown a bomb in the Indian Legislative Assembly in Delhi and been arrested. In due course, 30 June 1929 was declared 'Bhagat Singh Day' and came to be celebrated in the Punjab traditions of its eminent martyrs:

> [A] poem was read by Autar Singh 'Azad' of the Kirti office, in which he said that they had read accounts of the love stories of Ranjha, Hir, Sohni and Farhad, but now they have seen with their own eyes the deeds of the two

> young men who were cheerfully sacrificing their lives on the flame of the country.[41]

The stories were transgressive love stories whose heroes and heroines had challenged, and gone well beyond, the social mores of the traditional Punjab in order to attain happiness. Self-confessed radicals were now drawing parallels between the lives of those immortalised in the song and dance of the Punjab and contemporary romantic counterparts of familiar heroes whom today's would-be revolutionaries and radicals could aim to emulate through self-sacrifice.[42] The ways in which romantic tradition flowed into the new radicalism were observed, with scepticism, indeed sarcasm, by untutored police, in an intercepted letter which

> describes a dream in which a girl, who is supposed to be in love with Randir Singh, says to him, 'You are one of the big revolutionaries.' This minor point, revealed that Vir Inder's friends would consider it the height of bliss to be called a revolutionary by the girl they love.[43]

The police reports, nevertheless, touch upon a neglected aspect of the radical movement in the Punjab, which was the changing role of women among the young. Women in the Punjab did not go to college in anything like such numbers as men. In 1927, there were fewer than 2000 women in arts colleges, compared with more than thirty times that number of men, over 64,000 who were now studying in such colleges.[44] Yet young women had come to play a part in the politics of the province sufficiently prominent to attract the attention of police and journalists alike. The *Tribune*, the main nationalist newspaper in the Punjab, frequently commented, as a matter of course, on the number of women who regularly came to meetings and demonstrations. In the agitation before Bhagat Singh was hanged, an estimated crowd of 5000 women marched shoulder to shoulder in protest.[45] Some, it seems, had been inducted into politics during non-cooperation when, according to the jaundiced eye of police informers, they began to be quite active, frequently courting arrest and 'disseminating poisonous propaganda'.[46] A few women also achieved notoriety as terrorists. Nikko Devi, a widow, 'who [had] long been known as a supplier of arms to Punjab revolutionaries', was, in February 1928, reported to be 'plotting a terrorist outrage'.[47] Prakasho Devi, another woman who came to the attention of the authorities, was a signatory of leaflets which she issued in her capacity as secretary of the 'publicity department' of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army.[48] Many changes from the deep wells of Punjabi society lay behind this new phenomenon, notably changes in the urban lifestyle of middle-class families, whether the coming of the cinema to towns such as Lahore or other more subtle adjustments in daily routines, social changes which tended increasingly to take women out of their homes. As a recent thesis on early cinema in India has discovered, 'Punjab was the second-most lucrative circuit for Indian films after Bombay';[49] and most of these moviegoers were students, including, significantly, an increasing number of girls. In dress and in social conduct, the young women of the homely Punjab came now to be influenced by fashions and

behaviour depicted in movies emanating from cosmopolitan Bombay.[50] By 1933, Lahore alone had sixteen cinemas and, as one film magazine put it, 'the Punjabis are film mad.'[51] This 'madness' led to quite significant changes in the patterns of women's social lives and their attitudes.

As early as 1928, Sohan Singh Josh showed that the radicals were aware of these trends and ready to seize the opportunities to cultivate the first shoots of feminist liberation. He urged women to join the cause and wrote in glowing terms of the role of women in Turkey who had so successfully challenged the thrall of tradition:

> Sisters, hear me. The men who think that liberty can be secured through their sacrifices alone are mistaken. Your population is half the total population of the whole India. Sisters are the wheel of the carriage. Hence you will have not only to send your brothers and husbands to this war of independence but to sacrifice yourselves as well. Owing to our having remained in bondage for a long time our mentality has become slavish. Your sisters in Turkey have kicked off religious principles, and cast aside the veil. Your sister Sirojini Naidu [sic] was president of this All-India Congress. You should acquire education.[52]

But these few examples which hint at a growing awareness within the radical movement of the potential of women, were still very much the exception, not the rule. The radical left remained overwhelmingly male, and the discourse of radicalism was cast predominantly in a masculine mode, replete with references to manhood, male pride and the horrors and shame of emasculation. India was seen as the mother, who her young men had a filial duty to protect. Indeed, the manly virtues of strength and chivalry, lauded by the radicals, were contrasted with the almost feminine stratagems of Gandhi and the Gandhian way. A leaflet written by the Bengali, Sachindranath Sanyal, discovered by the Punjab police, asserted:

> Those who say that there is no revolutionary party in India are not telling the truth for such an organization of great dimensions really exists. The object of this party is to secure the independence of India by men of armed revolution . . . So long as India does not get her freedom, so long as foreigners remain in charge of her welfare, so long as there is a spark of manhood left in the youth of India, this Revolutionary Party will continue to exist, and Government will be forced to have recourse to repressive measures.[53]

Abdul Majid made the point with his characteristic brevity and bluntness: 'We are men, and we shall make ourselves men and shall take a man's right from you.'[54]

In marked contrast with Gandhi's more subtle teachings, with their sensitive appeal to the women of India, the radicals' notion of sacrifice was patently masculine and male-oriented. The British were to be fought on their own terms, and violence would be met with violence.[55] Gandhian non-violence and notions of sacrifice formed a very different strategy. It is now understood to have owed much

to traditionally feminine ways, well established in Indian tradition, using fasting, non-violence and indeed self-inflicted hurt in order to empower oneself in situations where women were fundamentally unequal, and where they needed such strategies to redress the balance against dominant males.[56] Instead of declaring his manliness, Gandhi preferred to suppress its dictates and rather spin cotton and in many significant ways emulate the characteristics of a virtuous mother. Gandhian conceptions of sacrifice were well received because his followers were not required to fight to the death. As the history of modern India shows, Gandhi's non-violence proved a more effective political strategy against a regime which was ill-equipped to deal with a movement of this sort than an outright challenge by force.[57]

In radical eyes, a martyr, as suggested in one of the earliest issues of *Kirti*, was a rebel ready to die for his country, unflinching whatever the punishment, a strong and resilient hero however daunting the challenge.

> The martyr is far higher than the standard of his time, and his views are far loftier than those of other people. The people who are tightly bound with the chains of conservative views cannot understand his lofty flights (of imagination) and independent views. (They), therefore, subject him to tortures and sufferings, rain condemnation on him and boycott him. When (the source of) all punishments short of death (punishment) is exhausted – he, however, sticks to his own inclination and remains firm and unshaken in his views like a mountain – then comes his turn for execution. Does he become upset on hearing of his death? Does he begin to cry? Does he make entreaties to save himself? Never. He rejoices, merry-makes, leaps and jumps and sings smilingly.[58]

Bhagat Singh achieved this iconic status because he so precisely fitted this bill: he was the embodiment of the ideal hero, a brilliant theoretician, a modern man who went to the films, an ardent nationalist and a committed celibate, undistracted by desire in his struggle against the Raj. In short, he had all the 'Qualities of a District Organiser' which the Naujawan Bharat Sabha listed, and much more to boot:

> He must have the tact and the ability to guide and handle the men of different temperaments.
>
> He must have the capacity to grasp political, social and economic problems of the present day with special reference to his Motherland.
>
> He must be able to grasp the spirit of the history of India, with special reference to the particular civilization which India has evolved.
>
> He must have faith in the mission and the destiny of a free India, which is to bring harmony in the different spheres of human activities, both spiritual and material.
>
> He must be courageous and self-sacrificing without which all his brilliant qualities will have no real value.[59]

But the most important trait that Bhagat Singh was thought to possess was the quality placed last but not least in the list of requirements, namely: 'Each member must be ready to devote his whole time for the association and risk his life if necessary – obey completely – not belong to any other association – to be punished with expulsion or death.'[60] When Bhagat Singh was hanged with two of his comrades, he had made the ultimate political statement and so won himself a place in the pantheon of Punjabi martyrs.

Another characteristic of the radical agenda was the way in which Marxism, and the example of the Soviet Union, was put forward as a solution to India's problems. A few Punjabis had somehow or the other ended up in universities in Moscow or in Tashkent, where they were trained as revolutionaries.[61] When they came back to India, their message was simple:

> The country which requires the doctrines that are being preached by Russia at this time is India – where people do not get full meals both times. Russia was in the same degraded condition. It cured itself. Russians are enjoying themselves today. We get neither houses to dwell in nor any clothes.[62]

It was therefore incumbent on revolutionaries in India to emulate the Soviet example. For them, 'Russia' was the ideal state, in which social relations had been reordered according to just principles.

> Every person who works has a right to eat. He who does not work has no right to eat bread. If peasants cease to work, this society can be destroyed today. Peasants alone can re-establish the society. Russian brethren realised that they would not let injustice be done to themselves. They brought about a revolution.[63]

In 1928, at Jallianwala Bagh, the same notorious meeting place in Amritsar where General Dyer had ordered the massacre of innocents and now a regular venue for these young firebrands, Josh urged an audience of predominantly kisans or peasants to aspire to Soviet ideals. 'I call revolution your own inqilab [revolution]. You should foster the desire that you have to destroy this system and establish that under which all may eat their fill.'[64] Through the rose-coloured spectacles of these would-be organisers of a Red Brigade, Russia was described as a land where everyone participated in a process of collective decision-making process, where a well-nigh 100 per cent literacy rate had been achieved and where each and every citizen shared responsibility for the state.

> The people of Russia created a revolution. After ten years their condition is such and they have become so intelligent that 95 to 96 percent of them have become literate, Lenin clubs exist at every place, where they discuss how to make progress.[65]

But when they extolled Russia's achievements, radicals such as Majid took greater care than some radicals not to give the impression that the Soviet Union

was in every respect a revolutionary utopia. Majid told one audience that in his meetings with people in Russia, he had

> asked one of them what was their condition in Tsar's time and whether they received bread. He said, 'It is a fact that we could get more bread, but we were degraded politically and economically. We have to starve now. But now we work for ourselves while previously we used to the same work for a capitalist. Previously we were kicked out even for a trifle mistake. None can now raise a finger at us. We are quite free politically. This very freedom keeps us alive.'[66]

The parallels with India did not call to be spelt out. The radical way challenged the British view that communism was simply Russian imperialism by another name. It stressed the benevolence of Russia's aims, as Arun Lal Sethi attempted to do when he declared:

> It was said by some that Russia would, if the opportunity arose, try to conquer India, but Russia only wanted to establish the rule of the workers and peasants and destroy imperialism, if, with this object in view war was declared by Russia on India, Indians would welcome it because it would not prove harmful to them. He thought that these were the only organisations with which the workers and peasants should form a connection.[67]

The Russia presented to Punjabi audiences by these speakers was thus a friendly and egalitarian society and, above all, a critically important ally for India and other colonial subjects against western imperialism. Its people shared the same moral convictions as Indians. In a revealing article, Josh described Russian women as being less sexually lax than their British counterparts.[68] However far-fetched these descriptions of Russia and its people may in fact have been, what matters is that the radicals saw the home of Bolshevism through rose-coloured spectacles which filtered out the bad and the ugly in a Soviet Union which had to fight a bloody and ruthless battle to establish itself and to survive.

The young radicals of the Punjab realised, of course, that their situation was not quite the same as that faced by the Bolsheviks in Russia: they were ruled not simply by the evil forces of finance capital, but by foreign capital. In questioning the right of the British to demand land revenue from Indian peasants, Russia became a metaphor for India's emancipation (and the Punjab's in particular) from illegitimate imperial rule. Majid, for instance, lauded the government in Russia for helping peasants in distress: 'Why, because there it is their own government. They feel the trouble of their own brethren', in contrast to British India, where 'the English men don't realise this. They say the "black" may suffer, but the English, white soldiers and judges should not suffer.'[69] Radicals also criticised other aspects of British rule, whether village patrols, forced labour or the levy of charges for canal water, all real grievances which affected the everyday lives of the peasants, all of which, they argued, would be removed if India became communist.[70]

Integral to the revolutionary agenda was social reform. Revolution was not a matter of slavishly following communist directives; it had to be situated inside the reforming agenda current in the Punjab and relevant to its particular circumstances. For example, the popular attacks upon moneylenders drew upon reformist ideas of caste equality.

> We wish to create a condition so that he who earns money from money and does not do any work himself, may be treated as a *chuhra* (sweeper). Today we have come to spread the movement of Bread. At this moment the principle question is Bread. A number of religions teach Unity but the question of Equality can be solved by bread only.[71]

In their vision of a communist future, moneylenders would become the social pariahs, the *chuhras*, in a just reversal of caste hierarchies. Economic change was the remedy for untouchability. What the radicals were trying to achieve was to translate the emancipatory language of Marxism into a Punjabi – and hence a religious – idiom.

> There are three communities in the Punjab. But this great man [Marx] remarked that all such divisions in the world were wholly wrong and false, and that there were only two classes and two religions in the world, and nothing else. He pointed out that one was poverty and the other richness.[72]

In this period, relations between the communities of the Punjab deteriorated and communal riots happened more frequently.[73] This was the political context in which the solidarities of community, being a Hindu, a Muslim or a Sikh, began to take on a new significance. This also was the context in which the Naujawan Bharat Sabha espoused what in effect was a new 'religion'. By this new 'religion', the radical left aimed, paradoxically, to capture nationalist ideas of Indian citizenship, and allied concepts of secularism, and appropriate them for their purposes and propaganda.

> The first and the foremost thing we need at the time is that we should produce Indians and make Indians. So long as we shall not remove this bigotry and hatred from our minds we shall never prove useful for the country . . . It is necessary that we should organise Indian youths and prepare them for the service of the country. We do not require Musalmans, Hindus or Sikhs alone. We invite all young men professing any religion to join our Sabha but their religion will be a personal thing and shall have nothing to do with the Sabha.[74]

These radicals saw religion as a dynamic process, as an article in *Kirti* which described the new faith reveals:

> (Religion) is in no way a touchstone for distinguishing between an infidel and a religious man. After discarding the old Hinduism, Mohammedanism,

> Buddhism and Jainism the people should accept the new "ism" called Communism. After giving up religions that divide men and cause bloodshed among them, people should now advance towards this new religion, which is giving the message of liberty, brotherhood and equality.[75]

The young cadres of the Sabha also wanted to show how different they were from run-of-the-mill politicians who used communal issues to win influence and power. 'We differ with the persons who have control over the Congress. They are capitalists and are involving the people in different sorts of quarrels for the sake of their interests.'[76] This sentiment reflected the fiercely secular bent of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha's new faith, but also explains why it lost potential support by prohibiting its members from taking part in any 'communal' organisation, whether the communist wing of the Khilafatists or that of the Muslim Student Union.

Another message in what Josh and his fellows were trying to give young Punjab was the meaning of 'true democracy'. The columns of *Kirti* regularly denounced the government of the Punjab and its legislative assembly. In its place:

> Communists wish to establish a real democracy, but we think that a real democracy cannot be attained under the capitalistic social system, nay, both these things are contradictory to each other. What equal right can a poor man have as compared with a rich man at present? The fact is that the Parliamentary Government is maintaining Government by capitalists alone under the pretext of public opinion, because the poor and the masses can have no control over society, but still occasions arise when Governments throw off the veil of parliamentary, constitutional or democratic Government also as was done last time in England by announcing emergency circumstances.[77]

'Real' democracy was not to be based upon the Westminster model. Nor was it simply to be a replica of the Soviet system. Indeed, the New World of the United States of America, quite as much as Russia, influenced and inspired some of these young radical socialists. Not a few young Punjabis had made America their home; and they had been influenced by living in a country where liberty, rights and freedom were written into the constitution.[78] Of course, some of them, particularly the Ghadrs, had left the United States, disillusioned that because of their race, they had not been given the rights of American citizenship in full measure. But even the Ghadrs understood and valued the panoply of rights that the people of the United States possessed under the constitution. By contrast, they saw how little the Montagu–Chelmsford reforms had given India:

> Councils have been opened. It is stated that your representatives go there. But in reality they are the representatives of their stomachs . . . Zamindars should also demand that land should be distributed among them because they cannot maintain themselves. We should form a government of peasants and workers. Why should a third person profit by our income. If he wants to gain profit, he should plough with us.[79]

As one writer in *Kirti* put it:

> There can be some justification if political leaders ask people in Europe and America to act upon the systems devised by these capitalists, because those countries have constitution relating to capitalist classes and also constitutional bodies of capitalists. But in a country like India where foreigners hold a sway such things amount to madness.[80]

Speeches by the radicals warned the people of the Punjab about nationalist politicians who claimed to speak for the people: 'Almost all the big leaders have proved traitors to the people. The people should now chalk out a line of action for themselves. Popular leaders should belong to the poor classes and should be free from selfishness.'[81] Their emphasis was on the emancipation of the masses. Calling upon the Punjab not to swallow accepted notions of deference and representation, Mir Abdul Majid questioned the standing of nationalist leaders and instead urged his followers to adopt a variant of communism tailored to the needs of the Punjabi peasantry. That variant eschewed communal politics, rejected caste inequalities and above all would win India the big prize of freedom from colonial oppression.

For the leaders of the Sabha, violence and terror were necessary means towards the end of achieving real democracy. To avenge Lala Lajpat Rai's death, after he was brutally beaten by the police during anti-Simon Commission demonstrations in October 1928, Bhagat Singh killed a British police inspector. When he was arrested, his comrades exploded over twenty bombs all over the Punjab. They were putting into practice methods learnt from the terrorist movement in Bengal, but now set in the Punjab tradition of a 'land of martyrs and fighters'. Self-sacrifice for the greater good was the crucial quality demanded by the Sabha's followers.

> If you Indians want to get something conceded, the future is in your hands. You can liberate the country by making sacrifices. I am sure if the country will ever be liberated it will be liberated by sacrifice on the part of young men.[82]

Violence was not merely the Sabha's counterpoint to the Gandhian way. It harked back to Lajpat Rai, who for some years had argued that Indians had the right to bear arms. Already in 1915, Lajpat Rai had written:

> The whole world is free to keep arms and use arms. Every civilized nation is interested in giving a military training to her boys and citizens and in teaching them the use of arms and other military tactics . . . but the Indians of India cannot keep arms . . . Why? Because they are a subject people. Their Government cannot trust them.[83]

Referring to 'Punjab' peculiarities, he warned, 'The Punjabees are a virile people, less versed in the art and ways of diplomacy and they can not for long be patient nor can perhaps the Bengalees who are a sentimental people.'[84] In 1915 also, a

large number of Punjabis, the Ghadrs, had returned from America to their homeland to fight the British with German help. Most of them were swiftly arrested and some were hanged. Yet, despite their unlikely crusade, they came to be venerated in the Punjab for their sacrifice and heroism. Stories of young Ghadr martyrs fuelled the fires of a frustrated and impatient Punjabi youth. A pamphlet of the early 1930s eulogised Nana Sahib and other 'heroes' of the Mutiny, claiming that India had failed to attain swaraj in 1857, in 1921 and again in 1930[85] because the country lacked the ferocity of its imperial overlords. Urging 'jihad', it called on Indians to 'come forward to die, [and] while dying kill your enemies and kill well.'[86] Between 1928 and 1932, the Punjab government recorded no fewer than thirty-six terrorist 'outrages', including setting off booby traps, cutting telegraph wires and raids upon armouries. For example:

> On the night of the 11th May [1932] the telegraph wires were cut some eight miles from Ludhiana on the Ludhiana–Ferozepore line. On the telegraph pole where the crime took place was found a manifesto purporting to be issued by the 'District Secretary of the Republican Association, Ludhiana' . . . On the following night telegraph lines were cut on three different lines within a radius of two and a half miles from Ludhiana. The gang men sent out to repair the lines found a cigarette tin near the scene of offences. This was picked up by one of the workmen when it immediately exploded, blowing off both his hands.[87]

Groups calling themselves the 'Bomb Party' threatened, according to the police, to avenge the perceived atrocities of the police and government. 'This form of activity is probably prevalent mainly among schoolboys and is symptomatic of the demoralization that is spreading through the rising generation.'[88] This encouragement of violence touches upon two recurring themes in the politics of the left. For members of the Sabha, violence was the only appropriate riposte to the ineffectual politics of mendicant, constitutional and even non-violent Indian nationalism. The example of Bhagat Singh would inspire others, something which actually began to happen, as the police reported with growing concern:

> Ram Kishen, President of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha moved a resolution appreciating the 'self-sacrifice, sincerity and bravery' of the Assembly bomb throwers and exhorting the young men to learn a lesson from their virtues. The gentleman who seconded the resolution warned the government that the imprisonment of Bhagat Singh would not end the youth movement but would rather cause hundreds of other Bhagat Singhs to appear.[89]

Government noted that agitation 'rose to its greatest height' in a crescendo of protest in the months before Bhagat Singh and his comrades were executed, suggesting that:

> the inevitable result of the canonisation of these criminals was to arouse in the minds of many young men a passionate desire to emulate their example

> and this desire provided the remnants of Bhagat Singh's party with an abundance of recruits.[90]

At one level, this discourse opened a general debate on political methods and was part of the attempt to legitimise armed action:

> No success based on non-violence can be called a success. Only organised violence on a large scale can secure success for the labourers and peasants. This idea should be made popular among the masses who are already entangled in the national war. They should thus be made ready to use violence in an organised manner as a weapon of success when any revolutionary opportunity arises.[91]

Such propaganda reflected the wish to get Punjabi men to take up arms against the British. An article written in 1931 makes the point:

> In order to prepare for armed rebellion, vigorous struggle must be made against the theory of non-violence and the necessity has to be explained that Imperialist occupation cannot be removed without armed rebellion and that it is an essential and indispensable thing. This means that the workers and peasants should be armed. It means that work should be done in army [sic] and that it should be made an ally and protector of the workers and peasants instead of the pillar of imperialism, and lastly it means that military training should be given to the labouring masses who, in future, will make a Red Army in India.[92]

Organised militancy was legitimate and was capable of succeeding, as the Bolsheviks had shown in Russia. The Red Army was held up as an example to Punjabis with powerful martial traditions of their own. As Bhagat Singh himself had realised, 'Use of force justifiable when resorted to as a matter of terrible necessity: non-violence as policy indispensable for all mass movements.'[93] For the Sabha, this was a time of 'terrible necessity', when conventional means of politics had to be jettisoned and the use of violence was a necessary, positive and essential component of the alternative political programme. In the Sabha's version of Marxism, violence and terrorist methods were needed because non-violence in India had failed. As the manifesto of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army, entitled *The Philosophy of the Bomb*, put it:

> The question really, therefore is not whether you will have violence or non-violence, but whether you will have soul force plus physical force or soul force alone.[94]

This reworking of the 'moral economy' was also evident in the Sabha's vitriolic abuse of 'capitalists', which was common currency in the speeches and writing of its leaders:

> Does the labourer want to strike unreasonably? No. Never. The labourer does want to get work and pass his life but the capitalists . . . whose business is it to commit *dacoities* in the open daylight and not to do any work wish to employ the labourers and derive unlawful gain from their labour of wages. Unite together . . . and give such a blow on the face of the capitalist that his teeth may fall out. Take your bread from him. We workers are described as *dacoits* and *badmashes*, but none calls that capitalist a *dacoit* who indulges *badmashi* day and night and thinks out crooked and deceitful moves to swallow and exploit the labour of the workers. It is my belief that so long as this capitalistic system exists in the world, no evil can be obliterated from the world.

Capitalists were now the *badmaashes* (villains) and *dacoits* (robbers) in India's new book of infamy: 'This very capitalism is responsible for evil deeds.'[95]

In the speeches and writings of the left, labour, significantly, played an equivocal role. The left, of course, had no monopoly of speaking for workers, much as it would have liked to appropriate the role of being their sole spokesman. As the Royal Commission of Labour of 1928 showed, there were other significant labourers in this vineyard: the state itself, and the many social reformers and trade unionists who competed effectively with the Naujawan Bharat Sabha to speak for organised labour. For the Sabha, workers had an essential part to play in its ideology; indeed promoting the rights of workers could be said to be its *raison d'étre*.[96] That Bhagat Singh bombed the Indian Legislative assembly on the very day (8 April 1929), when the assembly was about to pass two pieces of legislation on labour, the Trades Disputes Bill, which was intended to prevent strikes, and the Public Safety Bill, which forbade labour leaders from abroad coming to India, had its own piquant significance.[97]

Another way the Sabha hoped to enlist the support of labour and get the right to speak for it was opening a Workers' School in 1931.[98] Here the aim was to politicise a small group of Punjabis active in the labour movement, who in their turn, so the plan went, would spread the message to the work force. Many Punjabi radicals had also learnt about revolution at the University of Toilers in the East in Tashkent, and so this pedagogical approach, so they believed, was likely to work even in the very different circumstances of the Punjab. It also fitted with the Leninist idea of the role of the cadre-based vanguard in leading the revolution. In *Milap*, Ram Kishen wrote:

> it is necessary to produce a party of trained *parcharaks* and *nazims* [preachers and teachers]. For this purpose a few comrades met and decided that a centre be opened in Lahore for giving education and training of socialism to the people in labouring classes in particular . . . we also appeal to *Mazdoor* [worker], *Kisan* and Youth *Anjumans* [associations] to recommend young men who may be fit for admission in the 'home' and to send their names.[99]

To teach the workers was a necessary part of the Sabha's strategy. As Josh declared:

> If any person is to be remembered that person is 'Caral Marks' (Karl Marx). He is the first man in the world who looked upon the whole history of the world with a new eye, and told the poor people of the world – 'You are being looted. Recover yourselves. You can cure yourselves. You are suffering from hunger. If you arise, roar and play the lion today, all mean fellows will take to flight today. Class struggle means SHRENIJANG.'[100]

So it has been seen how, from 1926 to the early 1930s, the Sabha deployed 'communism' in complex and changing ways. It saw its political identity as being both Indian and Punjabi, in the context of a colonial state. Without doubt, the Naujawan Bharat Sabha was an articulate and effective vehicle in the Punjab, both for nationalism and for communism. It helped to shape the nationalist movement in the province and gave the Punjab its most celebrated martyr. It made much of the example of Bolshevik Russia but to win freedom for India, not to bring it under Comintern rule. Its secular message was intended as a riposte to communal politics. It also challenged Gandhi and the modalities of his politics. Both the youth of the Sabha and in a much more significant mode, Gandhi and his followers fought for India's independence, but from quite different perspectives and in quite different ways. The Naujawan Bharat Sabha was built around a cult of masculinity, of violence and of spectacular action against the colonial regime. It was a communism with a Punjabi twist, shaken and stirred by the enthusiasm of youth, but by no means slavishly following the dominant Soviet example and, in its strategy for nationalism, in stark contrast and in competition with the dominant trends of Congress under Gandhi.

The colonial response

In 1930, Brigadier Bannatyre suggested that propaganda was not enough to restore the government's authority in the Punjab. What was needed was yet another active show of strength by the imperial factor. 'Counter propaganda counts for little. Acts are what the men demand and can understand.' The white man was in danger of losing his grip, in the main because of the perception that 'The government is unwilling to take or incapable of taking action against those who are preaching revolution.' In order to assert its power, restore its prestige and stamp its authority, he advocated immediate and strong action by the government – shades of 1919, and a testimony to the lasting influence of the Punjab School's doctrine of ruling with an unwaveringly stern hand. He warned that 'the supporters of Government in particular are waiting for concrete proof that Government mean business . . . and if it is not soon forthcoming the position will very seriously deteriorate.'[101] In fact, the government took steps to curb sedition in the Punjab in different ways and at different levels, reflecting quite profound differences between the centre and the province on how best to tackle sedition.[102] Whatever caution the Punjab government may have deployed in dealing with Congress in the Punjab (paradoxically, a consequence in the main of Congress strength in provinces other than

the Punjab), it had no such qualms when dealing with the communists. So Lahore interned mujahadins returning from fighting for the Khilafat because of their communist links, and arrested Ghulam Hussain, a college teacher, in the Cawnpore Conspiracy Case of 1924 for being a notorious Red. The Meerut Conspiracy Case led to the trial and incarceration of three Punjabis, all with known communist affiliations: Sohan Singh Josh, Abdul Majid and Kedar Nath Sehgal. By 1931, most of the leading figures of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha had been rounded up, given lengthy prison sentences or strung up and hanged.

The Punjab government successfully resisted all attempts by Liberal and Labour politicians in London to question or soften this repressive policy.[103] The Home Department supported the view that Lahore had to maintain steady pressure in the war against sedition.[104] But there was debate in New Delhi about what extraordinary powers were needed for this purpose, just how heavy the iron fist should be, this at a time when a Seditious Meetings Act and the Criminal Law Amendment Act were being put on the statute book by the Home Department. Even at the height of Civil Disobedience, the Governor in Council, in contrast to the Punjab administration, believed that 'steady and rigorous application of ordinary law, general strengthening of administration with the object of restoring the confidence of the people in the intentions and ability of the government to defeat the movement' was more important than the application of extraordinary measures.[105] However threatening to order the Civil Disobedience campaign might seem, there were good reasons not to resort to extraordinary powers, not least 'the desire to avoid precipitating a general crisis so long as any chance of a peaceful settlement existed'.[106]

Gandhi's Salt Satyagraha and Civil Disobedience had a considerable impact not only in the places where it really took off but also in neighbouring provinces. They also helped to make Punjabi youth more radical. But the Gandhian way did not change the foundations of Unionist politics in the Punjab, the patron–client relationship between landowners of all three communities and their followers in the countryside. So, both at the centre and in the province, the government was ready in the main to rely on ordinary laws to contain Civil Disobedience in the Punjab. Yet in the same period, the seven most prominent bodies with communist or socialist leanings within the Punjab, which included the Punjab Provincial War Council, the Punjab Naujawan Bharat Sabha and the Worker's Training College in Lahore, were all declared unlawful associations under the Criminal Law Amendment Act.[107] Significantly, all of these groups were led by persons who had been politicised by the Naujawan Bharat Sabha.

The government also witnessed fierce debates among the policy-makers on how best to conduct the war to rally popular opinion to its side in its campaign to win hearts and minds. For its part, the central government did not want to proscribe *Kirti*, 'partly because it is felt that attempts merely to repress, proscribe and outlaw were likely to advertise and even attract sympathy for a type of agitation against which it should be possible to enlist a considerable weight of public support.'[108] The imperative for the government was to keep the loyal Punjabis on side and 'to endeavour to arouse public opinion to the danger inherent in' radical

politics.[109] So, the Director of the Information Bureau in the Punjab was told to try and steer public interest away from heroic accounts of revolutionary terrorism which was the stock in trade of *Kirti* and the Sabha, and the Bureau's improbable success in doing so encouraged the centre to try similar tactics in other provinces outside the Punjab.[110]

But, faced with terrorism which eulogised the 'national heroes Bhagat Singh and his fellow assassins',[111] the depleted legislative armoury of the Punjab was seen by the policymakers to be no longer 'fit for purpose'. To strengthen the official hand, in October 1931 the government passed the India Press (Emergency Powers) Act. It gave the government powers to punish 'the laudation of murder or murderers in the press and also to seize objectionable pamphlets and the like.'[112] The Emergency Powers Ordinance of January 1932, reproduced in the Special Powers Ordinance of July 1932 and finally modified in the Punjab Criminal Law Amendment Act in November 1933, was another set of measures which gave the government special powers to curb terrorism. Under the Punjab Criminal Law Amendment Act, persons who the government had reason to believe were about to disturb the peace could be arrested and incarcerated for up to two months without the benefit of *habeas corpus*. Additionally, the government was given powers to prevent people from moving out of (or into) particular parts of the province. In consequence, 'The position at present is that with the help of these two enactments terrorism is definitely under control.'[113]

Part of the government's reaction to the radical challenge was to come down heavily on college students, who were seen as prime troublemakers. Government urged the principals of leading colleges to help in this mission and encouraged parents' associations to discipline their children, charging them to 'take a deeper and more constant interest in the activities of their sons.'[114] The Punjab government also put money into setting up and running an alternative students' union, in order to woo students away from being influenced by those who were so blatantly promoting the terrorist cause.[115] The aim was to provide a counterweight to the blandishments of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha and the Punjab Students Union. Surprisingly, government-sponsored unions showed some signs of doing the job expected of them, in the main through the lavish outlay of government funds.[116] More sinister, and perhaps more effective, was the not wholly veiled threat by the government to deny graduates government employment unless colleges drove sedition out of the classroom.[117]

It was not only the government that tried to curb the unruly behaviour of these radical youths. In August 1929, Jawaharlal Nehru chided 6000 young men at a Naujawan Bharat Sabha Conference in Amritsar. He professed to be shocked that they had dared to criticise the actions of their 'elders' in a Sabha resolution which protested against Congress action in preventing a motion of sympathy for Bhagat Singh. The report on Nehru's remonstrance continued as follows:

> Jawaharlal also impressed on them that they could not all be leaders and that some of them had to form the rank and file . . . he told his audience that it was most necessary for them to discipline themselves and warned them against

> any attempts to destroy the structure of the Congress which represented the work of the last 46 years.[118]

In the event, the government in the Punjab succeeded to some considerable extent in dampening down both communist and Congress activity. By the early 1930s, civil disobedience in town and countryside had petered out in much of the province. Congress was regarded as a 'defunct' body, according to the Deputy Commissioner of Lyallpur, a keen observer. In March 1932, Congress activity was deemed to have become 'extremely feeble'. Efforts by the Sabha to celebrate Bhagat Singh Day were also dismissed as having been 'singularly unsuccessful'.[119] The lack of interest in the anniversary of the launching of Civil Disobedience 'illustrates the depth to which Congress has sunk in the Punjab'. Unquestionably, stock in the Punjab of communists, socialists, radicals and even nationalists had fallen dramatically.[120]

Yet in 1934 the Punjab government once again feared it was about to face a revival of the radical left, following legal appeals against the judgement in the Meerut Conspiracy Case. In September 1934, Lahore resorted to its old tactic and proscribed another five socialist and communist bodies, making them unlawful, despite their palpable weakness. The Punjab government now took the lead in what was to become an all-India policy of renewed repression, even though the province was less infected by the virus of dissent from the left than, for example, Bombay or Bengal. The reasons why these particular groups were banned was because they were suspected of being fronts for the proscribed Communist Party of India and were all 'seeking to exploit the present depression among the peasants by cleverly combining the expression of legitimate grievances with the propagation of communistic doctrines.'[121] Interestingly, the Punjab government was ready to allow expression of legitimate economic grievances and 'made no attack on any unions or labour organisations.'[122] In a word, this showed how the government and the radical left were continuing to compete with one another for the support of the people of the Punjab.

An important weapon in the armoury of the Punjab government in its war upon the left was Regulation III of 1818. This very old piece of legislation proved it still has its uses against agitators against whom government had little hard evidence. Thus:

> It was recognised fully during the discussions which we have recently had regarding the use of the Criminal Law Amendment Act that though the Act might prove useful in dealing with communists when they took overt actions, yet the provision of that Act will not be effective in dealing with the secret communist worker.[123]

Even though it was admitted that 'at the present moment the strength of the Communist Party in Northern India is not such as to cause alarm or to constitute a great danger', it was deemed essential in such situations for the Government of India 'to give clear indication that they were not prepared to allow these Moscow

trained Communists to work up a conspiracy in furtherance of the aims of the Communist International.'[124]

In the early 1930s, communism was on the wane in the Punjab. The government had slapped into jail or driven underground the few people who were openly communists and had successfully damped down such support for the cause as they had enlisted among young people. Terrorism had been curbed and civil disobedience for a while had failed to rally the masses. Congress remained the big danger, but in the Punjab the Congress had been kept at bay. The Unionist Party, a friend to the government, maintained its grip over rural Punjab and won office again in the 1937 elections. So the Punjab administration had less incentive than before to make distinctions and drive wedges between Congress and communists in the province.

This chapter has highlighted the internal contradictions within these early movements of the left in the Punjab. Some of these contradictions were the consequence of the left's attempt to give a voice to those excluded from the mainstream of politics; and these contradictions were to become more apparent once the government opened up the political game, widened the electorate and gave the provinces a much greater measure of political autonomy in the Government of India Act of 1935.

3 Learning the new rules

The Punjab left in the 1930s

The 1930s marked a new phase in Indian politics. The Congress had now to make friends capable of winning at the ballot box and find ways of influencing a much enlarged electorate. These developments had an impact on communists and socialists, who for their part also had to devise new tactics to protect and consolidate their political position, both locally and nationally. Underlying this sea change were two major developments: the Communal Award of 1932 and the Government of India Act of 1935.

The Communal Award and the Government of India Act have been the subject of much study, and much speculation, by many scholars,[1] but a synthesis of these views is not germane to the thrust of this chapter, which looks at the impact of these developments on Indian politics, not least the politics of the 'Punjab left', which were not immune to the new political context. By enshrining the principle of Muslim separatism in the constitutional arguments by which India was given a much greater measure of provincial autonomy, the Award and the Act which followed it, changed the rules of the game, and this led, in the Punjab as elsewhere in India, to a realignment of the major political groupings.

It is well known that the 1935 Act was a strategy for the British to stay on in India and to retain hold over the key determinants of power and sovereignty by a retreat to the centre, not (as some Whig interpretations would have it) a significant milestone in a planned and staged withdrawal from empire. What are less well known are the ways in which the small print of the electoral arrangements introduced in 1935 were designed, as in the reforms of 1920, to fortify the hands of those perceived to be Britain's collaborators and friends and to weaken its critics and enemies. By recasting the electoral balance between town and countryside in favour of the latter, the Legislative Assembly in the Punjab, in which, under the Montagu and Chelmsford reforms, the rural constituencies outnumbered urban constituencies by four to one, the towns now had only nineteen seats, whereas the countryside had 130, or a ratio of seven to one between secure rural localities and the hotspots of urban unrest. Urban representation in effect had been halved (see Table 3.1 on p. 73).[2] The plan was that urban 'dissent' and militancy was to be redressed in the new arrangements by fortifying the hand of loyal peasants and landed interests and their loyal peasants. These moves were carefully calculated

with political canniness, indeed cunning, in a province regarded as strategically vital, and they were further afforced by provisions at the centre to prevent any combined assault by the provinces upon central citadels. How things actually worked out was a rather different story and, in the Punjab as in so many other provinces, the electoral outcomes were not what the government (or indeed their critics) expected.

The influence of the Unionist Party and its leadership upon the making of the 1935 Government of India Act can hardly be exaggerated.[3] In some respects, the Act, and the Award which preceded it, were written to a Unionist brief: Muslims got 86 of the 175 seats in the new Punjab Assembly, guaranteeing the Muslim majority (55 per cent of the population) almost half the seats (49 per cent), thereby assuring their continued dominance over the politics of the Punjab.[4] None of this was acceptable to the Hindu Jats within the Unionist alliance led by Chhotu Ram, as the walk-out of Hindu and Sikh members of the Punjab Legislative Assembly when the Communal Award was announced in 1932 had clearly demonstrated. Indeed, the Award could quite easily have led to the break-up of the Unionist Party[5] had Chhotu Ram and his followers not been placated by the huge increase in representation to rural constituencies in the Punjab Legislative Assembly given by the 1935 Act. Since the very considerable measure of provincial autonomy which the Act gave them largely insulated the Punjab and its politicians from the all-India stage, the Unionists could continue, in a Punjab ring-fenced, to an extent, from what was going on in the rest of India, to plough their regional furrows, despite major changes taking place beyond their provincial boundaries. Indeed, the 1935 Act weakened, and almost destroyed, the fledgling Congress movement in the Punjab, a development which in its turn changed its relationship to the radical left. Since Lala Lajpat Rai's death in 1928, Congress in the Punjab had divided into two warring factions, that of Dr Satyapal on the one hand and on the other that of his rival Dr Gopichand Bhargava, who captured Lajpat Rai's Servants of the People Society, which was described by a Criminal Investigation Officer as 'perhaps the most dangerous organisation we have in the province at the present moment.'[6] By claiming to be Lajpat Rai's political legatee, Bhargava and his faction, moreover, had joined with the Congress High Command to claim to be spokesmen and protectors of trading and non-agricultural Hindu interests in the province. The other faction of the Congress in the Punjab was also predominantly Hindu. It too had its roots in very similar Arya Samaj soil. However, Satyapal's faction played down its specifically Hindu identity, hoping instead to gain influence by capturing existing networks of Congress workers in the towns. Satyapal, the man in the 1920s behind the Naujawan Bharat Sabha, which had done so much to radicalise students in the Punjab, had a record of working on the ground in the Punjab's urban constituencies. Yet the rift between Bhargava and Satyapal and their factions was to dominate and distract Congress politics in the province for years to come. In 1938, at Nehru's command, Sri Prakasa was despatched to the Punjab in order to see why the local Congress was so divided and to heal these long-standing and dangerous divisions. In his rather blunt assessment that personalities, not principles, were the root of this ignoble fratricidal strife, he

wrote, 'Dr Gopi Chand is jealous of Dr Satyapal's power in Punjab politics, and Dr Satyapal is jealous of Dr Gopi Chand's influence over Mahatama Gandhi and the Congress leaders at Head Quarters.'[7] In fact, these two factions had rather different spheres of influence, different sources of local support and a different focus to their efforts at political mobilisation. But they had much in common as well. Congress was already so weak in the Punjab, indeed on the verge of extinction, that its divided leadership realised that their internecine struggles might be the end of both houses. Bhargava needed the support that Satyapal could muster, whereas Satyapal could not credibly claim to lead Congress without the backing of key notables in the Bhargava faction, in particular Dr Saifuddin Kitchlew, as well as the institutional support of the Servants of the People's Society and other organisations which had played an important role during Civil Disobedience, such as the Harijan, the Village Industry and the Spinners' Association.[8] Both factions laid claim to being the fuglemen of nationalism in a province which they did not command, lonely figures forever harassed or jailed by government for daring to back the Congress cause and the civil disobedience movements which Congress launched. Government kept both factions on a tight rein, preventing their members from moving around the province. This in turn led Nehru to complain in 1936 that:

> The attempt of the Punjab Government to stifle political work by arresting or interning provincial workers and preventing people from other provinces from entering the Punjab, is one which must lead unless checked to a paralysis of political activity in the province. We cannot be parties to this end.[9]

So the two competitor factions of this much-weakened Congress in the Punjab had reason to bury the hatchet and join in resisting the government to win a share of representation under the new electoral arrangements.[10] Both spoke with one voice on the Poona Pact, by which the 'depressed classes' were denied separate electorates under the provision of the Communal Award. The all-India imperatives which made Congress so keen to keep the depressed classes within the Hindu fold are self-evident. But in the Punjab, the provisions of the Poona Pact led to severe cuts in the already exiguous representation of Hindus in the General seats. As a result of the Poona Pact, eight of forty-three Hindu or General seats were henceforth reserved for members of the depressed classes. This deeply upset the Punjab's high-caste Hindus, mainly urban dwellers and traders who constituted the traditional backbone of such support as Congress had in the province. Indeed, they were so disillusioned by the Pact that they decided in July 1934 to set up a splinter group to challenge the Congress in the province.[11] This group held conferences which rejected the official Congress line on the Communal Award. They argued that the Communal Award was undemocratic and that the failure of the Congress High Command to reject the Pact was a betrayal of nationalism and 'pandering' to India's minorities, ironically ignoring the fact that Hindus and Sikhs in the Punjab were themselves an endangered minority in their own province.

> This conference strongly criticises the INC for acquiescing in the obnoxious anti-national, unsatisfactory and anti-democratic Communal Decision by remaining neutral and appeals to the INC leaders to revise their attitude towards it in the next session of the Congress and thus celebrate its Jubilee by really making it a national organisation.[12]

Other groups in the Punjab followed suit. For example, the Khalsa Darbar passed the following resolution in December 1935:

> The INC, being the premier political organisation of the country did not rise to the height of responsibility in adopting a non-committal attitude with respect to the Communal Award, which it so strongly condemned and this session strongly urges upon the Congress, on behalf of the Sikh community, to revise their present attitude and to unequivocally oppose the Communal Award, which is obviously anti-national, retrograde, reactionary and undemocratic.[13]

These responses, and the fact that elections under the 1935 Act were on their way, placed Congress and its workers in an impossible position. They had to try hard to justify the party line to potential supporters, and this was virtually impossible to do. The volume and tenor of the complaints from a confused and divided Punjab leadership to the Congress High Command show just how desperate they had become. Each letter repeated the same refrain, pleading with Congress to impose some clarity of purpose and give the rudderless provincial organisation a steer in the right direction before the voters went to the polls.[14]

One attempt at a resolution to what was in fact an impossible dilemma was to try and re-brand the Punjab Congress to appeal to the much larger rural electorate and to forge alliances with parties which had already shown that they were more in tune than Congress with the aspirations of the new voters. One such group was the radical socialists and communists in the Punjab. From uncertain beginnings, they had become a force to be reckoned with, having made inroads into the Punjabi hinterland. The context of Punjab politics had changed, and with it, the political trajectory of the radicals. Both factions of the Punjab Congress began to realise the benefits of forging alliances with the comrades, 'atheistic' and 'doctrinaire' though they were and despite their having previously been shunned by Congressmen. In other arenas of Indian politics, the strategy of Gandhi and the Congress High Command is well known. That strategy looked to Congress cadres, recruited primarily from dominant agricultural castes, in the main from central and western India, who were urged to direct their energies to constructive work, 'harijan uplift' and spinning. However, there were other leaders in Congress, disillusioned by the stop–start tactics of civil disobedience, who wanted to attack its inherently conservative and capitalist leadership and transform it into a socialist body. In 1934, Acharya Narender Dev, Jayaprakash Narayan, and Minoo Masani set up the Congress Socialist Party, which held its first conference on 17 May in Patna,[15] just when the government was about to outlaw the Communist Party of India under powers it had arrogated to itself under the Criminal Law Amendment

Act. The Congress Socialist Party was to have a profound effect on Indian politics, not least on the activity of communists and socialists in the Punjab, where the new controls were most stringently applied.

Another significant development was that Muslims throughout British India came increasingly to be alienated from the Congress and the nationalist camp. Muslims, who once had been prominent in the Khilafat and non-cooperation movements of the early 1920s, now shunned the civil disobedience movements of the early 1930s. Muslim leaders in the United Provinces and Bombay, who dominated the Muslim League, objected deeply to the Congress stance on the Communal Award, which was to refuse publicly to endorse separate electorates. Everyone who expected to benefit from the Award was disappointed with the Congress. Muslim leaders in the Punjab were less concerned than their counter parts elsewhere since they were confident that they would do well out of the Award. Consequently, the Congress in the Punjab had no option but to join forces with 'communal' parties such as the Sikh Akali Dal, but also to try and win a greater measure of support among the landed interests and especially the peasantry, which they hoped to do by making common cause with the left, both socialists and communists. It also tried to get some Muslim support by its mass contact campaigns. Yet this tactic was a double-edged sword, since it could equally well have alienated potential sources of important Muslim support, as Emerson, the Governor of the Punjab, explained to the Viceroy in a report, which also reveals how little he trusted his officials and the Congressmen of his province:

> Congress efforts to capture Muslims continue, but there seem to me to be signs of Muslim feeling hardening against Congress. The controversy between Jinnah and Jawaharlal and the attack of the latter on Fazl-ul-Haq are not helping Congress with the Muslim public generally, although in the towns there is always a certain number of Muslims ready to take any side which will bring them the limelight. I have fears that the All India Congress Committee has allotted a large sum for the conversion of Muslims generally to the Congress creed, and that about Rs. 30,000 has been allotted for propaganda in the Punjab. Dr Alam is said to be the chief agent of the Congress. If this is true, a considerable portion of the allotment is likely to stick in his pocket.[16]

The big question for our present purposes, however, is how the radical left responded to these challenges within a rapidly changing political environment. So far the burden of this book has been that, notwithstanding the line taken by all-India bodies or by the Comintern or even governments in India, politics in the Punjab, whether mainstream or the more marginal movements in the radical left, were in the main the product of local conditions in the province. When the Naujawan Bharat Sabha and communists forged links with the Congress, it was a local variant of nationalism expressed in ways which were, more frequently than not, ideologically confused. This chapter will focus upon the changing relationship in the Punjab between the left and the Congress. It hopes to show how

these traditional antagonists came grudgingly to accept that there were compelling reasons for them to cooperate, the gulf in policy and practice between them notwithstanding. This chapter also illustrates the growing interdependence of the colonial state and its critics as, step by step, electoral politics changed the rules of their engagement.

Opportunities and restraints: the Punjab Congress

In July 1934, the Punjab government had outlawed five communist and socialist organisations[17] and soon after one more was added to the list.[18] In taking these draconian measures, Lahore was the first provincial government in India to act, reflecting its particular sensitivities to the perceived threat from the left. After communism was once again outlawed, the party's political choices became significantly narrower. Parroting its master's voice in Moscow, communists were required to condemn the Congress, its Central Committee denouncing Congress as the real enemy and mocking fellow travellers such as Nehru.[19] However, within a year, things had changed dramatically. The world was in flux, both in the Far East and in Europe. For the first time, Lenin's doctrine that there could be circumstances when the priorities of national liberation took precedence over those of the class struggle made sense in the real world.[20] In India, the recently organised Congress Socialist Party began to win a measure of support among militant youth within the Congress ranks. To take advantage of these radical trends in Congress, the Indian Communist Party's manifesto urged its cadres to accept the Congress for what it was: a mass movement despite being led by Gandhi, a leader who was usually described in communist parlance as a 'reactionary'. So, its members were urged to join the mass movement headed by Congress but to try and give it a new leadership.

> In order to survive the crisis it has got involved in, under the inspired guidance of Mahatma, the Congress must be a militant mass organisation. To undergo such a transformation it must have a clearly defined programme of National democratic revolution, and a new leadership that can guide it in the struggle for the realisation of the programme. Nationalism that is the striving of the oppressed and exploited masses to be free from imperialism is a revolutionary movement.[21]

Another significant development to which the communists had to react was the creation, in 1935, of the All India Kisan Sabha, led by Swami Sahajanand and his deputies, Jaya Prakash Narayan and Professor N. G. Ranga. This all-India body purporting to speak for the peasantry quickly enlisted some support among the Kisan movements in the Punjab. Kisan organisations successfully persuaded government to give them a substantial rebate on water rates and land revenue in 1931,[22] and they were geared to launch another round of Kisan protests in central Punjab. Ranga and Jaya Prakash Narayan came to the Punjab, attracting large crowds whenever they spoke. At a meeting in Faizpur in the neighbouring

province of the United Provinces, which Zetland described as a 'considerable success',[23] Narayan declared:

> We think that British rule is responsible for the plight of the peasantry and it cannot be improved so long as that rule lasts. This of course is true, but then we conclude from this that we have first to rid ourselves of that rule and then improve the condition of the peasants. Therefore no attempt is made at present to relate the dire needs of the peasants with the struggle for independence, to make that struggle itself a struggle for reduced rents, revenue, freedom from debt, a more just distribution of the burden of taxation, a juster system of tenancy and so on. I suggest that this way of thinking is typical of the middle class. Clearly we have not yet learnt to think like the masses because we are not yet close enough to them.[24]

Here, he openly challenged the Congress line, which demanded independence first and then promised to turn to social and economic reform. The most pressing need, according to Narayan, was to promote these two objectives simultaneously. Conscious of his privileged background, Jaya Prakash Narayan and his coadjutors showed a far more sensitive understanding of these issues than conventional accounts of Indian socialism give them credit for.[25]

In January 1934, Sohan Singh Josh, after he came out of jail, tried to unite all the groups on the left in the Punjab. He made his call for unity at a meeting symbolically held in the Jallianwala Bagh. The meeting lasted for an improbably long day and much of the following night, some seventeen hours in all. The reasons why the participants failed to reach agreement during this mammoth session were many; but the main one was that each faction still had its own distinct source of money, whether Ghadr from its links in the United States, or the communists from Comintern, or more local providers of funds such as the Congress Socialist Party or the even the backers of Naujawan Bharat Sabha. If they had united to form one official party, it was likely that they would have lost some of these inflows of funds and certainly quarrelled over the division of such spoils as remained.[26] However, Josh did manage to set up a Karza Committee, which contained representatives of all these factions, to press for debt relief for the Punjab peasantry, demonstrating that on particular issues the left could sometimes work together, while remaining divided institutionally and separate from other bodies.[27] From time to time, the Congress Socialists and Kisan Sabhas joined to organise strikes against rents or water rates and in these campaigns they had a measure of success in matters which closely concerned the people. But the communists could exploit popular discontents only if they were prepared to adopt flexible tactics and eschew Bolshevik dogma. This is what the Communist Party of Great Britain, in particular Rajani Palme Dutt and Ben Bradley, advised them to do, stressing how important it was to achieve 'Unity of all the anti-imperialist forces in the common struggle'.[28] In fact, this policy suited Punjab conditions quite well, and markedly better than those of some other provinces. In the Punjab, the Congress was weak and hence there was not such a gulf between its position and that of communists and social-

ists as elsewhere in India. In the Punjab, the Communist Party's line of depicting Gandhi as a betrayer of the nationalist cause, particularly by his perceived failure to prevent the hanging of Bhagat Singh, echoed what everyone to the left of centre already thought. 'The Mahatma sits on the shoulders of the forces of the national revolution like the old man of the sea, paralysing their power to think by blind faith, dampening their will to fight by transforming the nationalist politics into a mystic metaphysical cult'.[29] Gandhi, in the opinion of these self-appointed men of the future, was a 'has-been' who had outlived his usefulness. At the same time, pragmatists among the communists recognised the potential of Nehru's brand of nationalism and particularly that of the Congress Socialist Party, in which swaraj and alleviating poverty were two sides of the same coin, very much the message that the communists previously had tried to convey to India's politicians.

> The future of India will be worked out by the masses, who are awakening to take up a gigantic revolutionary struggle, for freedom. They are fit for this historic role of honour because they have nothing to lose but their chains of colonial slavery, and a world of political freedom, economic progress, and social Emancipation to gain.[30]

The increasingly radical language used by Nehru made it acceptable for communists to be seen to express similar sentiments in similar terms. It also helped them appear more plausible candidates in the coming elections of 1937 than they otherwise would have been.

So the Punjab proved to be the seedbed of new collaborations between the Congress and communists, foreshadowing similar developments in the rest of India. The Naujawan Bharat Sabha had set itself up as a forum which had much in common with a nationalism which was moving to the left. Inevitably, radical groups continued to split into factions while they had to remain underground, but conditions for a greater measure of cohesion and some collaboration with other groups were now ripe, given that they were surfacing into the open. In 1933, when the British released the 'communist' Meerut prisoners on appeal, this was yet another reason for Congress and communists to make common cause. Kedar Nath Sehgal, part of Bhagat Singh's coterie before the wide-scale arrests of the late 1920s, had been a Congressman of some importance in Satyapal's faction. He had become party secretary, and Josh's group, which had set up the Kisan Karza Committee and the Radical League, attracted a number of Congressmen, particularly members of the Congress Socialist Party, such as Mian Iftikarudin, an Ahrain of note with strong socialist leanings, who had helped to lead the peasants' local wars of 1935.[31]

The election of 1937 and 'tickets'

The Punjab Provincial Congress and the Provincial Congress Committee of Bengal were the two provincial Congresses which most vociferously (and for the obvious reason since they had no prospect of winning office) advocated a

boycott of elected ministries after the 1937 elections. But nevertheless they were determined to contest the elections. This meant that they joined in the scramble in the Punjab to get tickets as candidtes.[32] In 1934, Vallabhbhai Patel had tried to impose some order and control over the rank and file of the Congress after four years of disarray during Civil Disobedience. Along with Rajendra Prasad and Acharya Kriplani, Patel and the High Command were determined to control the nomination of all Congress candidates in the coming elections.[33] By imposing strict rules on how the provinces, districts and talukas of the Congress were to be organised and also disciplined, by rules on membership, the wearing of khaddi and the spinning of cotton, he imposed the will of the High Command over the all-important patronage of allocating tickets to those wanting to stand for election. In the Punjab, at first, it looked as if these measures had achieved their purpose. Gopichand Bhargava and his coterie reorganised the Punjab Congress Committee constitution under the new guidelines from above and kept a firm grip on all of the important Congress posts in the province. However, this was not achieved without a struggle and many old Congressmen clearly did not like the new Congress constitution. Significantly, those who complained to the centre did so by throwing back at the High Command the consequences of its own new priorities. So Gopichand's men were vilified in communal terms as foreign cloth merchants. For example, Duni Chand of Ambala wrote to Nehru that:

> Dr Satyapal and his friends have always set their face against communalists and reactionaries while Dr Gopichand and his friends have compromised the Congress at times by making compromises and parleys with them. The communalist press in the Punjab has taken advantage of this and worked against the Congress on this basis. The recent selection of candidates for the Punjab Legislative Assembly, the putting forward of no Congress candidate against Dr Gokul Chand Narang and his own coming forward at the eleventh hour are proofs of the conduct of Dr Gopichand in this respect.[34]

Satyapal's faction was condemned as being 'power-hungry', undisciplined and rowdy, so much so that they were even accused of physically destroying votes cast in a local Congress election by the novel and indigestible method of eating them. It looked as if such disputes would dominate the 1937 election in the Punjab, and continue long after them. So the rules of who could be or could not be Congress candidates had to be relaxed in the Punjab. This had the result that tickets were given to anyone the local Congress leaders thought might successfully win against Unionist candidates. With this simple strategy in the ascendant, every faction recruited persons who included well-known communists and socialists to boost Congress's chances in rural Punjab and particularly amongst communities which hitherto had associated Congress only with urban Hindus. For instance, Master Kabul Singh, a young and enthusiastic communist, was given a ticket in rural East Jullunder, a hotbed of factional disputes.[35] Raghbir Kaur won a woman's ticket in preference to other candidates because of her socialist connections, while a Ghadarite communist, Swatanter Singh, was given a Sikh ticket even though he

was still in jail. Overall, six radical Sikhs got Congress tickets, even though these turbaned lilies neither spun cotton nor toiled in fields.

While remaining predominantly Hindu in membership in the 1937 elections, the Congress in the Punjab did put up some Muslims, such as Mian Iftikarudin to contest seats. Reports suggest that Iftikarudin was more persuaded by communist propaganda than by Congress.[36] However, some of Mian Iftikarudin's former fellow travellers, such as Mohammad Alam, himself a sometime member of the Congress Working Committee, now set up exclusively Muslim political parties in an attempt to win the Muslim vote.[37]

> Dr Alam is a Barrister. He was previously a member of he Legislative Council – loud voiced and of violent speech, but nothing much behind. He represented the Muslim cause in various suits and proceedings relating to Shahidganj, and so increased his influence. Although he got elected on the Shahidgunj ticket, he subsequently joined the Congress.[38]

The Ahrar Party was another Muslim party, which had its roots in the Deobandi movement and was opposed to Alam's Ittihad-i-Millat Party.[39] Its following was mainly in urban Punjab and it decided to cooperate with Congress, the Communists and the Congress Socialists to campaign against the 1935 constitution and the 1937 elections. Independents, such as the veteran campaigner Dr Saifudin Kitchlew and the 'Meerut-returned' Sohan Singh Josh, also joined forces with Congress. Kitchlew had been arrested in 1919 just before the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and now stood as an independent candidate in the Amritsar Muslim urban constituency, while Josh stood as a Socialist Independent in the rural Sikh seat of Amritsar. Congress was not the only party to draw upon communists and socialists in this effort to garner support in the province. The Shiromani Akali Dal of the Sikhs followed suit, seeing an opportunity for these Akalis to benefit from opportunities in the 1937 elections by making new allies among the radical left.

Propaganda

Every candidate for election in 1937, whether Unionist, Congress, Socialist, Akali or Ahrar, had to appeal first and foremost to his or her own religious community. This blunt fact of Punjab politics had many implications. Above all, it meant raising one's standing in the community by stressing religion. This required political ideology or a secular stance to take a back seat. In so far as all candidates had a similar message, Unionists included, it was the call for redistributive justice in a broadly socialist society.[40] Sikander Hyat Khan, the leader of the Unionist party, was thus able to claim that the Unionists were the only truly secular party in the Punjab, whereas his fellow traveller, Chhotu Ram, the Unionist leader of Hindu Jats in East Punjab and former President of the Punjab Legislative Council, argued that the Unionists were the 'true Congressmen' of the province. In his opinion, the Unionists alone were untainted by communalism, the central plank in their programme being the non-communal demand for a fairer deal for the Punjab peasantry.

So suddenly the Punjab was alive with all manner and sort of politicians claiming to be the guardians of 'true' Congress ideals. For example, on May Day 1936, the Punjab Socialist Party and the Radical League had merged to form the Punjab Congress Socialist Party to take their message to the people of the province. They stated that, if elected, they would not serve in government and would instead work from within the legislat to wreck the new constitution. To celebrate this amalgamation and to secure support in the Punjab, the Congress Socialist Party leader, Minoo Masani, planned to tour the province in September. But the Punjab police put a stop to his visit, since Masani of course was a notorious socialist. As soon as he arrived in Lahore, he was 'externed', but he managed to stay for dinner with his old friend Dr Satyapal before being escorted back to Delhi to complain of the repression which the unfortunate people of the Punjab had to endure from its notoriously stern and unbending administration.[41] However, Satyapal continued to push the cause of the Congress Socialist Party in the province. Even at the risk of alienating loyal Congress supporters, he advocated far-reaching agricultural reforms. Not to be outdone by its archrival, Bhargava's group also now claimed to be the true spokesman of the rural interest. However, it was communists, such as Sohan Singh Josh, in the Bhargava camp, who, not surprisingly, were most active at the grassroots, being old hands at 'uplift' work of this kind. Thus it was the radical left which actually carried out national Congress directives in the Punjab rather than the local stalwarts of the party.[42]

During the election campaigns, Nehru himself was one of the most frequent visitors to the Punjab from the High Command. He came not only to try and sort out the wrangling inside the Congress, but also to try and disseminate the Congress message. Impressed by the record of the Soviet government, Nehru also had close ties with Labour politicians in Britain and used the election campaigns of 1936 and 1937 to outline his vision of an independent and socialist India. Indeed, one historian has gone so far as to assert that Nehru was the first politician to make the idea of socialism popular in the Punjab.[43] Whatever the truth of such a claim, Nehru, with his high all-India profile, on his whirlwind tours of the Punjab gave a fillip to local Congress and radical politicians alike.

However limited his political influence in the Punjab, Nehru was, nevertheless, a radicalising force, delivering speech after speech on the need for independence and with independence, the imperative for independent India to achieve a greater degree of economic equality for its peoples. This was the heart and centre of Nehru's 'mass contact'[44] campaign, his aim being to broaden the appeal of Congress among peasants and Muslims and to mobilise new and vital bases of support where the Congress message had not previously reached. This was of particular significance in the Punjab, where the social and religious background of most local Congressmen stood in the way of their making a successful appeal to the new voters, peasants and Muslims alike.

An interesting angle on Nehru comes from provincial intelligence sources which, reluctant though they were to recommend internment of one of India's most prominent politicians, nevertheless kept an eagle eye on his impact upon the Punjab. One such report described Nehru's activities in the following words:

> In all his speeches he stressed economic matters and the need for a socialist order and he emphasised that the amelioration of the conditions of workers and peasants and the establishment of a socialist state could not be effected without first securing independence from British rule.[45]

Nehru saw the elections as an important milestone in the long and hard journey towards independence, but of course from a rather different perspective than that of the government: 'He impressed on his hearers that the battle of freedom would not be won in the Councils, but in the fields, in the factories and in the bazaars.'[46] For the government, however, the most worrying aspect of Nehru's visits was his potential impact upon rural Punjab:

> the effect of his visits to the countryside is likely to be more dangerous. The peasants are eager to hear solutions of their economic difficulties and the Pandit's visit has proved the existence among the rural class of interest in such questions as socialism and independence and has stimulated this interest.[47]

According to this report, Nehru's mission was to make socialism legitimate in the eyes of peasantry of the Punjab, which heretofore had been kept isolated from this dangerous infection.[48]

Local activists prepared for Nehru's meetings months in advance. Village and district committees organised fairs and gatherings to make sure that the new messiah's coming was not unannounced. Nehru's visits ruptured the calm of district life, as locals took advantage of them to promote their own agendas.

> There is great activity among Socialists and communists in this district in preparation for a conference which Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru is expected to attend. Small parties are going round the villages holding meetings to advertise the conference. Much of the speaking is actionable and all of it is objectionable and dangerous when delivered to illiterate audiences. It is a crude blend of socialism, communism and hardly veiled sedition, and full vantage is being taken of any local grievance, real or imaginary, to stir up discontent.[49]

The officer charged with analysing 'the Nehru effect' came to a less generous conclusion, portraying Jawaharlal as a glamorous would-be superstar rather than a serious politician with a cogent message, in much the same way as the Unionists were to dismiss Jinnah when he made his own, stunningly ineffectual, single visit to the Punjab. For example, the Superintendent of Rawalpindi reported Nehru as being:

> Held in great respect by the people collected in the meeting especially by the Hindu women . . . I believe there was no one in the meeting who understood to begin with what Jowahar [sic] Lal was driving at, and secondly no one

> was sufficiently interested in the subject to think out details and question him . . . All that they had come for was to see Pandit Jawaharlal – the man who had been educated at Harrow, had lived a luxurious life in England and in India, the man who had had his clothes washed in Paris and the man who had now forsaken all the luxuries of like and the wealth of his family and had undergone numerous imprisonments for the sake of his country.[50]

All of India – and the Punjab was no exception – loves a festival or tamasha, and Nehru could always be relied upon to put on a good show. Moreover, he was known to have renounced pelf and purse for the sake of the greater good of the people of India, something that went down well in a province steeped in traditions of martyrdom and self-sacrifice. He could, plausibly, be likened to heroes of yore in the Punjab and be presented as a model of renunciation to the politically minded young men of the province.

Such was Nehru's standing that he received many letters from quite low-ranking Congress men imploring him to come to the Punjab to put a full stop to the interminable wrangling which for so long had characterised the local party.[51] There are other aspects of Nehru's impact upon the Punjab which call to be noted. First, his visits led two Hindu candidates who intended to oppose the Congress to make 'spectacular withdrawals'.[52] Also, in the heat of the general elections, his presence did tend to dampen down the quarrels and rivalry within the Punjab Congress, albeit temporarily. Third and perhaps most importantly, the line he took in his speeches made it legitimate for those on the left to demand fundamental, almost revolutionary, changes. By linking socialism with nationalism, Nehru helped to create a context in which it was no longer out of bounds for Congressmen in the Punjab to talk about socialism and the rights of workers and peasants.

Nehru, of course, was only one of several all-India leaders who came to the Punjab in their enterprise of attempting to dislodge the Unionists. Pandit Malaviya, a former President of Congress, now angered his erstwhile colleagues in the Congress by publicly supporting the breakaway Congress Nationalists in the Punjab, who had set themselves up to oppose the official Congress line of studied neutrality on the Communal Award.[53] In much the same way, Jinnah, the leader of the All India Muslim League, also realised the importance of trying to improve the League's standing in this critically important Muslim-majority province. On his famous incursion into the Punjab, Jinnah went to a number of student conferences and League meetings throughout the province, with an agenda which was designed to vilify the Unionist Ministry and whose underlying purpose was to press for a joint League and Congress front against the Unionists.[54] Interestingly, in the election manifesto of the League, Jinnah, according to one intelligence official, included 'Congress doctrines with socialistic tendencies'.[55] The audiences he attracted consisted mainly of Muslim students and workers, who had had enough of the 'reactionary'[56] Unionists. However, despite much talk of an united front between the Congress and the League in the Punjab in 1937, this proved to be a pipedream. Twenty years after the Lucknow Pact, there was to be no repeat of that alliance, or any variant of it, in Lahore. Most of the leaders, whether Congress or

League, tried to raise the level of interest in the elections by using siren songs, some with socialist overtones, which had similar themes. But the result was that voting at the elections continued to run along tracks laid long ago. Yet no one can doubt that the foundations had been laid in the Punjab, and indeed beyond, upon which the socialist and mixed economy of independent India were in due course to be constructed.

Results

By'shooting Niagara' and vastly increasing the electorate in the 1935 Government of India Act, the British calculated that they would fortify the hands of their collaborators and friends. In almost every Hindu-majority province, the results of the elections proved them to be spectacularly wrong. But in the Punjab the elections showed that in this province alone the British had got it right. The Unionists achieved a landslide victory in nearly all Muslim constituencies, as well as in the rural Hindu seats in the south-east of the province. In 1937, another Unionist ministry under Sir Sikander Hayat returned to office. This ministry was a coalition of the nine Hindu rural members returned by constituencies led by Chhothu Ram, three representatives of the depressed classes, one European, one Anglo-Indian, two Indian Christians and all the rest Muslim, making a grand total of ninety-five Unionists, a clear majority in an Assembly of 175 members (see Tables 3.1 and 3.2).[57]

In the Punjab, the elections of 1937 were not the victory of communal politics, but rather a triumph for the old political system that the British and their Unionist allies had set in place in the 1920s. It was a reaffirmation of the dominance of the Punjab's landlords and agriculturalists and those who joined the army, in other words their traditional friends and clients upon whom the Raj depended in the Punjab. In the elections, the Muslim League was routed. Only one member of the League was elected to the Assembly. For its part, Congress won a mere eighteen seats, only one of which was Muslim. By their calibrated construction of those

Table 3.1 Quotas in the Punjab Legislative Assembly

General (including 8 seats reserved for Scheduled Castes and one for Women)	43
Muhammadan (including 2 seats reserved for Women)	86
Sikhs (including 1 seat reserved for Women)	32
Anglo Indians	1
Europeans	1
Indian Christians	2
Commerce	1
Landholders	5
Labour	3
University	1
Total	175

Table 3.2 The Punjab Legislative Assembly Election Results, 1937

Unionists	95
Congress	18
Khalsa National Board	14
Hindu Election Board	11
Akalis	10
Hindu Independent	7
Muslim Independent	5
Scheduled Caste Independent	4
Sikh Independent	3
Ahrar	2
Ittihad-i-Millat	2
Muslim League	1
Congress Nationalist	1
Socialist	1
Parliamentary Labour Board	1
Total	175

Source: Home Political File 111/1937, NAI.

who were given the vote in the Punjab and the careful drawing of constituency boundaries, the British and their Unionist allies, for the time being at least, had kept the all-India parties, whether Congress or League, out of the province. This was a fact of major importnace in the endgame of the Raj in India.

Of the twenty-nine seats it contested, Congress, it has been noted, won only eighteen, which nevertheless made it the second largest party in the Assembly. Significantly, one in three, or six of these eighteen Congress seats, were won by communists or socialists. The remainder were won from Hindu members of the Nationalist Congress Party. As the Director of the Intelligence Bureau noted, ‘The Congress success in the towns was almost entirely won at the expense of the Nationalist Progressive Party representing Hindus of the Hindu Sabha school.’[58] However meagre these victories, they were a cause for celebration in the Congress and they demonstrated just how far things had improved from the dire straits in which the party had been before the elections.

> As was expected Pandit Jawahar Lal’s visit on the eve of the polls considerably helped a number of Congress candidates and the Provincial Committee and Parliamentary Board were somewhat surprised at the extent of their success after a very inauspicious beginning. The disintegrating effects of personal jealousies were temporarily checked by the Congress President’s visit.[59]

Yet government observers were gratifyingly surprised that Congress had done so badly in the countryside, particularly in the eastern part of the province. As one intelligence officer put it:

> Thus in the eastern rural districts of the Punjab where, under the leadership of Rao Bahadur Chhotu Ram, a political organisation has been built up in the past years, the electorate, largely consisting of Jats, Rajputs, Ahirs and Gajars, still preferred their tribal leaders and rejected every Congress candidate, although in the adjoining rural districts of the United Provinces with a population of much the same type, the Congress were largely successful.[60]

Their failure to win Muslim voters earned the Punjab Congressmen a stern reprimand from the High Command. Nehru expressed his displeasure that internal strife within the Punjab Congress had led to so few Muslim seats being contested.[61] Indeed, there were Congress candidates in only twenty-nine seats in the whole province. As one government source succinctly put it, 'In the Muslim constituencies in the Punjab general questions of policy counted little, and electors chose their local leaders.'[62] Even where so-called allies of Congress ended up winning seats, along the way they continued to fight bitterly with each other. For example, 'In Amritsar the successful Congress members were taken in a somewhat rowdy procession round the city and some Ahrars showed their resentment at Dr Kitchlew's success by throwing stones at his carriage.'[63] But, interestingly, the mass contact campaigns of Congress continued well after the elections were over, since the otherwise disappointing results of these elections rammed home the lesson of just how imperative it was for Congress to win greater support in the Punjab if its claims to represent every community were ever to be at all plausible. But the end result was that the Congress merely succeeded in the Punjab in joining forces with the Sikh Akali party to form a small, politically ineffectual but vocal opposition in the Assembly, under the leadership of Gopichand Bhargava.

All in all, thirteen persons known to have socialist and communist antecedents became members in the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) in the Punjab Assembly. Of them, Congress had given six tickets to represent the central rural tracts of the Punjab, including five former members of the Ghadr party, among them Mange Ram. The communists, Harjap Singh and Master Kabul Singh, were elected, despite both of them being 'interned' in their villages under provisions of the Criminal Law Amendment Act. Orders which the government of the Punjab was forced to rescind once they were elected as MLAs. As one government report put it:

> Harjap Singh, the ex-State prisoner who was confined to his village, and Master Kabul Singh, another Communist worker who was ordered by Government not to make public speeches, have been released from all restrictions under the Punjab Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 1935, to enable them to sit in the Punjab Assembly to which they were elected. Both of these members, along with other communist representatives in the Assembly, have since been very busy.[64]

Another 'radical' Congress socialist, Iftikarudin, defeated a prominent Unionist leader at the polls. However, this triumph was attributed to Iftikarudin being a

leader of the newly enfranchised community of Arains, market gardeners, and a scion of a prominent and wealthy Lahore family to boot, rather than a consequence of socialist views, of which he made much during his election campaign.[65] Sohan Singh Josh, who was returned from the Amritsar constituency, was another radical who won a seat. He described his own election campaign as taking a line distinct and independent from that of the Congress and the Muslim League alike, and conducted without benefit of the patronage of either party. Rather, he attributed his success to his popularity in his constituency among Sikh farmers of the central Doab tracts.[66] He gained 7140 votes in the Amritsar North Sikh constituency, while his opponent, Lieutenant Sardar Raghubir Singh Rais (Landlord), who came nearest to him, got only 2825, or less than half.[67] The thirteen candidates from the radical left who succeeded at the polls had taken advantage of an unprecedented opportunity to express their views in a forum from which they had previously been excluded. By gaining access to the arena of electoral politics, they now helped to give the politics of the Punjab new orientations.

Inside the Assembly

After 5 April 1937, those who had for so long dominated the Punjab Council now had to deal with a quite different breed of politicians, some of them – from their perspective – being regarded as a rabble. In a report to New Delhi in which he gave his impressions of the new Assembly, Emerson, the Governor of the Punjab, described Sikander's problems in trying to teach his party how to behave in the Assembly:

> The first session of the Legislature was definitely a success from the Government point of view . . . Sikander had a Party meeting before the session began. He found some difficulty in making his supporters understand that it was no longer open to them to get up and criticise the Government, since in doing so they would be criticising their own leaders. Even the most loyal among them have been so accustomed to have a mild grouse against the 'Sirkar' that they are a little disappointed to find that this will no longer be possible. They say that the opposition has much the easier job, that it does not require much ability or eloquence to have a dig at the 'Sirkar', but it requires both to be always in the position of the defendant.[68]

In the past, his followers were wont to blame the British for all their difficulties. But victory at the polls had changed many poachers into gamekeepers. As members of the party in office, they now had to defend what the state was doing. Before 1937, the Unionists had only one single Congress member (a woman) in opposition. Now they faced what by comparsion was a not inconsiderable phalanx of thirty-five Congress and Akali members, all of whom, on the first day the Assembly met, symbolically donned white caps and khadi clothes, as 'a visual demonstration of the new order'.[69] In the Assembly, which previously had been dominated by administrators and nominated members, this very visible opposi-

tion now took their seats; and on the very first day, Dr Mohammad Alam asked why the Members of the Assembly had to stand up to hear the Governor's speech to the House. The Leader of the House replied, 'I have noticed with regret that some members remained seated when the Governor's message was read. It was a matter of showing respect to His Majesty the King Emperor.'[70] In their white khadi, Congressmen nevertheless introduced a splash of colour to the Assembly by carrying Congress flags. As one newspaper reported:

> The Congress benches in the Legislative Assembly today were gay with a profusion of miniature tricolour flags. They were placed on the desks in front of each member and showed vividly against the black plush of the seats . . . several members, including non-Congress members, such as Sir Mahommed Yakub, wore tricolour buttonholes on the lapels of their coats.[71]

On the second day of the session, the opposition staged a walkout over a dispute about the election of the Speaker. Within forty-eight hours the tone of what was to be a much more confrontational parliamentary style had quickly been set. The opposition saw their role as to challenge the polite manners of high politics and a cosy closed shop of the Punjab Assembly from which previously they had been excluded. Many of them refused to speak in English even if they were fluent in the language;[72] and some of the newly elected members took it upon themselves to challenge each and every accepted norm of behaviour in the House. This was in line with the strategy advocated by the Congress High Command to their members in provinces where they were not in a majority. Congress MLAs in the Punjab swiftly learnt the arts of parliamentary opposition – if not effective in votes, at least noisy, troublesome, and disruptive. Sikander Hyat Khan, the Chief Minister, complained that opposition members who challenged him in the chamber were being 'disloyal'. As Emerson commented:

> What does Sikander expect the opposition to do if not oppose? It is surely of the essence of the Parliamentary system that from the point of view of the government of the day the opposition should appear to be 'incorrigible' and 'entirely unready to listen to reason' and because the opposition in the Punjab is living up to this reputation it savours surely of the rankest melodrama to talk of 'finding their way back through blood'. Incidentally where is it that Sikander Hyat Khan expects to find his way back to along this dolorous way? I must admit to being badly puzzled.[73]

Replying to his Governor, Linlithgow showed how little faith he had in democracy as a way of ruling the millions over whom the Viceroy still had ultimate charge:

> I cannot resist the further suspicion . . . that like the great bulk of his countrymen he believes essentially in his heart of hearts in firm personal rule, a conviction the wisdom of which experience may yet show! I think I did

> mention in an earlier letter that there were signs that the appeal of totalitarian doctrines, particularly to the younger generation, was definitely growing, and we may well find that having with so much labour devised what we regard as the best method extending the benefits of democracy to this country, we have presented India with something for which she has already lost her taste.[74]

All this was the froth and bubble rising out of deep currents in the new politics of the Punjab, and indeed of India. And it was particularly so in the Punjab Legislative Assembly, where radicals in opposition, whether Sikh or Congress, set themselves up as the champions of the peasantry and challenged the old Unionist claim to speak for the masses.

On his very first appearance in the chamber, Sohan Singh Josh cut to the chase by asking how democracy should be defined. He questioned the legitimacy of an election in which 76 per cent of the population had been refused the right to vote. In the chamber of the Punjab Assembly, he warned:

> when the people of Russia were not granted the rights to form a government of the people, by the people and for the people, they brought about a revolution, with the result that they wrested those rights from the imperialists.[75]

In his view, the Punjab could learn much from the Russian experience given how much loyalists or 'allies of imperialism' 'place[d] obstacles in the way of the people'.[76] Thus an Assembly in a province which had particular reason to fear the Bolshevik example now was forced to listen to Josh praising the Soviets and, to add insult to injury, he spoke in Urdu (a practice for which he was continually criticised, since English remained the designated language of parliament in the Punjab even after permission was given for the vernacular to be used).

During the same debate, another issue was raised, which gave a hint of the wider radical agenda. It was asked whether those who collected revenue for government, the *zaildars* and *lambardars*,[77] and were charged with maintaining law and order and suppressing 'sedition', should, as servants and beneficiaries of the colonial state, be allowed to stand for election and represent the very people they were exploiting. A Congress Socialist colleague of Josh, Mian Muhammad Iftikarudin, proved to be a fierce critic of things as they were in the Punjab. The system which ensured the hereditary rights of the Punjab's landed aristocracy was, in his opinion, the root of the evil.

> Again the problem involved here is far more important and wider than the mere question of lambardars or zaildars aspiring to represent their constituencies in this House. The question involved is as to whether the landed aristocracy is to rule us or whether the masses also are going to have a voice in the administration of the affairs of this province . . . It cannot be accepted as true that a post which is held on a hereditary basis makes a person who inherits it a true leader the moment the previous holder dies.[78]

While it is clear that the election, in 1937, of a handful of vociferous communist and socialist members affected the tone and content of the debates in the Punjab Legislative Assembly, no one can claim that it fundamentally altered the balance in Punjab politics, tilting it towards a new radicalism. Admittedly, the more extreme politicians, though few in number, sharpened the terms and tone of the debate. Iftikaruddin, for example, urged Punjabis to understand that the ways in which democracy worked in England were not relevant to India and to the Punjab. 'The position in England was that the English masses fought with their own countrymen in order to get rights for themselves. Here the situation is entirely different.'[79] Iftikaruddin, and others of his ilk, argued that Punjab's chamber was not just somewhere in which to raise the familiar themes of anti-colonial rhetoric, idealising the Soviet experience or criticising the political values of conservative Punjab. Rather it should be a forum in which the grievances of the Punjab's underprivileged called to be addressed. So Iftikarudin, for his part, frequently attacked the repressive habits of lambardars, working in collusion with the police, to lord it over the Punjab's still mainly disenfranchised peasantry. Sohan Singh Josh and Hari Singh repeatedly tabled motions urging the government to do more for rural Punjab. When crops were destroyed by hailstorms in seven villages, it was Josh who raised the matter in the Assembly and called upon the government to step in and help. The records of the debates of the Legislative Assembly are replete with such instances of radical intervention. When the Unionist government was persuaded to write off debt in a series of Agrarian Bills in 1938, this was seen as a victory for the Karza Committee,[80] and most Congress politicians in the Punjab had to go along with what was evidently a more proactive line in favour of the peasantry than in the Assembly of the 1920s and early 1930s.[81]

But addressing the needs and concerns of the peasantry was not, of course, a new development in the Punjab. The British had from the start presented themselves as the guardians of the Punjab peasants, their protectors against predators, moneylenders or even the vagaries of the monsoon.[82] What was new was the challenge to the old assumptions that the British alone (or even their Unionist allies) were the true defenders of the Punjab peasantry. That every politician in the Punjab had now visibly shifted his focus from the towns to the countryside was a cause for particular concern to the government. In 1938, when Sir Henry Craik, the Governor of the Punjab, reported the bye-election victory of Dr Satyapal in the Amritsar–Sialkhot Rural constituency by a large majority over a local opponent he wrote, 'I am afraid the result of this bye-election is pretty clear proof that the Congress have greatly strengthened their hold on the rural Hindus in the Central Punjab.'[83]

Another straw in the winds of a changed climate was the sharp debate about the Punjab police and its relationship with the peasantry, part and parcel of the efforts to address the daily concerns of rural Punjab. Master Kabul Singh argued against a motion to increase police salaries. Far from the police helping the peasantry, the fact was:

> That they [the peasantry] are forced to pay 'thikri-pehra' even though their own cattle which they keep in their farms may be stolen. It is a pity that when

> they return home exhausted after a hard day's labour they are made to patrol the streets of their villages . . . It is my conviction that the police does not protect the honour of the public. On the contrary it heaps indignities upon them.[84]

Indeed, Kabul Singh went on to make unfavourable comparisons between the notoriously harsh police in Bengal and their Punjabi counterparts, claiming that the Punjab police were if anything worse than brutal agents of the Raj in Bengal. In the Punjab, anyone who tried to visit political prisoners were turned away by the police with the simple, but deeply revealing dictum, 'This is Punjab sir.'[85] The claim that it was the police that kept the Punjab's rival communities from each others' throats was stood on its head by Kabul Singh's retort that 'I would charge the police with the responsibility for causing communal riots.'[86] These were strong words, uttered by a man who had served time; the very fact they could be openly stated in the Assembly reflects a fundamentally changed political atmosphere. In the chamber after 1937, Master Kabul Singh's attack could not simply be ruled out of order by the speaker as seditious. Strong language from persons who previously would have been thrown into jail for being outspoken had now to be tolerated in the parliamentary forum of the province. Political and radical Punjab, not just loyalists, lackeys and toadies, had won the right to speak out in the Assembly.

In short, the Punjab Assembly was a changed place, with *demos* making its entry into a once strictly controlled and disciplined environment. The opposition tackled many matters previously regarded as taboo, such as the high salaries that ministers gave to themselves and all the other privileges to which the old elites were accustomed. Bit by bit, the opposition began to whittle away at the comfortably large majority the Unionists had on such issues when they came to vote. When the Assembly first met, the Unionists tended to win motions directed against their policies with majorities of between fifty and sixty. However, after the defection of some key members including the Ahrain, Narullah, to the Muslim League, this majority came virtually to be halved to around thirty. In consequence, in March 1939, when Hari Singh tabled a motion designed to cut revenue and water rates, it was defeated by only seventy-nine votes to fifty-three, a majority reduced to twenty-six. Interestingly, four ministerial members did not cast a vote on this motion and Mian Narullah, complaining that the Unionists had reneged on the pledge in their manifesto to improve the lot of the Punjab peasantry, actually voted against his own party which was in office.[87] The narrowest escape of an Unionist measure was Sikander's Assembly Offices (Sergeant at Arms) Bill of 1939, which was passed by only three votes, forty-five to forty-two, a commentary on just how ineffectual the Unionist three-line whip had come to be.[88]

Driving these big changes was the fact that radicals, who previously had urged the Punjab to take the path of revolution outside the constitutional framework, now were making a perceptable impact inside the Assembly. This had the consequence of raising their standing in the Punjab, and also changed the ways in

which people perceived the Punjab Legislative Assembly. In 1929, Bhagat Singh had thrown a bomb into the Central Legislative Assembly chamber, Delhi, in order, symbolically, to wake up those complacently seated inside the chamber. Eight years later, the Assembly itself had become the most visible forum of dissent in the Punjab. Demonstrations and rallies often ended at its doors and this gave the politicians who sat inside the Assembly a legitimacy and mandate which those outside now acknowledged and sought to influence. On 24 January 1938, 'A mammoth demonstration in Lahore in which two thousand students played an active part tried to make its way to the assembly to place its demands before the Government . . . People in the demonstration, whose identity is not known, threw a few stones which broke some windows in the assembly.'[89] The following year, agitation outside the doors of the Assembly was stepped up to a new level.

> One of the most important events of the month has been the efforts of the Lahore District Kisan committee to stage a demonstration in front of the Punjab Legislative Chamber. Instead of the 50,000 tenants that the Committee proposed to lead, 300 persons arrived in Lahore on the evening of the 22nd of March. The organisers were well aware of the Government's policy which is based on the custom in London not to allow demonstrations within a fixed radius of the place where the legislative meets. This did not however prevent them from organising dull meetings on the 22nd and 23rd of March and then forming a procession with the intention of defying the order under Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code, forbidding them to enter a proscribed area.[90]

In reporting this demonstration to the Viceroy, the Governor added that the agitation 'is expected to fizzle out in a few days from now.'[91] But the agitation did not fade away. In fact the following month, Craik had to report:

> I am sorry to say that the tiresome Kisan demonstrations at Lahore still continue. The total number of arrests made up to 10th of May was 1127, including 157 women. About 7 arrests a day are still being made, but I understand that funds to finance the movement are now running low.[92]

The only way that the Punjab authorities could reassert control over the physical area around the Legislative Assembly was to put the organisers of the protests into jail and declare these meetings to be unlawful, a sledgehammer to break the increasingly hard radical nut inside and outside the Assembly.[93] The fact that radicals had become members of parliament gave them a legitimacy and a measure of influence that they had previously not possessed. Now, they were invited by trade unions to preside over their meetings; the public listened to their rhetoric with a new respect and the authorities had to think twice before throwing them into jail. Above all, they now had a licence to speak their minds. For example, at one meeting:

> Lala Sham Lal, Member, Legislative Assembly, presided over the first meeting . . . Sham Lal's speech dealt almost exclusively with Socialism . . . In the second and third sessions socialist and communist workers were very prominent and Mohan Lal, an active communist and the real editor of the Urdu 'Kirti' had to be checked by the President for going too far in his socialist propaganda. The conference was well attended and it is unfortunate that most of the leaders of this movement are extremists with communist tendencies.[94]

The big change was that radicals used their position as elected members openly to advocate the very issues for which previously they had endured long spells in jail.

Intelligence officials were clearly worried that radical MLAs would stir up unrest among the Punjab's peasants. In their eyes a once-contented 'yeomanry' was now in dire danger of being infected with the virus of disaffection. One report carried the following account:

> A few Communist members of the Legislative assembly toured their constituencies on bicycles to see what damage had been done to crops by the hailstorms of last month . . . By waiting on local officials and making representations to Government, these Communist leaders hope to gain popularity. They will claim credit for any remission in revenue granted by Government and in cases in which the peasants feel that they have not received enough consideration blame will be laid at the door of the Government.[95]

Communist cadres had learnt to adapt to changing opportunities in contemporary politics and to exploit economic discontent to their political advantage.

In his autobiography, Sohan Singh Josh describes how winning a seat in the 1937 election fundamentally altered his own position.

> Before the election I was just a district leader. But after I was elected to the Punjab Legislative Assembly . . . I overnight became one of the leaders of entire Punjab. I was welcomed and honoured everywhere – a Communist getting elected to the Assembly was a big, and new, thing then in the eyes of the Punjabi people. My election not only raised my estimation in the minds of our people, but the election campaign also helped greatly the growth of the Communist movement in Punjab.[96]

Josh recognised that his victory at the polls raised his status as a leader in the Punjab and also raised the standing of communism in the province.[97]

Josh's damascene conversion to constitutionalism was not simply an obedient response to central party diktat. The process was more complex than that. But it is undeniable that the party encouraged its followers to go down the constitutional path, as an official communist pamphlet written in 1938 suggests. Communists now began to have a different relationship to the Congress. Congress ministries were described as 'our' ministries: 'The Congress is our organisation, and therefore the Congress Ministers are people's ministers',[98] and Congress was the

'leading anti-imperialist organisation in the country'.[99] Communist pamphlets underlined the new political opportunities which came with Congress accepting office. The Legislative Assembly was now portrayed as a dynamic institution, with the potential of being deployed to transform the political scene. A new breed of politicians now had a chance to force government ministers to behave in the political arena quite differently from before. Thus, in a report back to the Viceroy, Emerson complained that whereas Sir Chhotu Ram and Sikander Hyat Khan as premier had

> done some touring and addressed some meetings . . . The other three Ministers have done very little in this direction. There have been very few meeting indeed organised or addressed by supporters of Government other than the Ministers, and there is no comparison between the number of meetings organised by the Congress or communists and those organised in support of Government. District officers frequently comment on this, and unless the ministerial party wakes up, it is likely to lose ground.[100]

In the Punjab, the first faltering steps towards constructing a constitutional response capable of challenging imperialism had been taken. At last, the constitution had come to be seen as a way of undermining the Raj, and the left accepted that elections mattered and winning them was of the essence. For radicals and the colonial regime alike, the terms of political engagement had changed, and changed beyond recall, never to return to the unequal balance between rulers and ruled which had been the essence of the Raj's security in the Punjab.

Conforming to traditional political mores

In these ways, during the 1930s, the colonial state and the radical left alike had to reconsider, and then fundamentally restructure their political strategies. To make the new constitution work, the Punjab administration no longer had the option of merely shutting out from the Assembly its political enemies, whether communists or Congress nationalists. Putting them into jail was no longer an option. For their part, the radical left now wholeheartedly joined the electoral process, served as elected members and used their position in the Legislative Assembly to advance their cause.

But, of course, these changes meant that both sides, with their very different and ultimately incompatible agendas, were bound to clash. Take, for example, the sensitive issue of recruitment in the Punjab: at all costs, the British felt they had to protect their ability to recruit soldiers from the Punjab, particularly once war was on its way. Yet radical Punjabis had no intention of being tame collaborators, and they had the key matter of recruitment very much in their sights. An essential element of the Punjab tradition was to promote stereotypes of the martial and loyal Punjabi, the backbone of the British Indian Army. In the First World War, half the recruits of a massively increased army were recruited from one province alone, the Punjab. For long, Punjabis had taken pride in their status as India's soldiers.

They had done well by joining the army, both materially and in terms of social standing. Attacking their role as Britain's enforcers in India and beyond was, in the Punjab, inevitably the deployment of a double edged sword. So Congress and the radical left alike had to take a subtle line, by lauding the martial tradition of the Punjab on the one hand but arguing that new channels for its expression had to be found. For example:

> It was announced during the fortnight that a branch of the National Militia had been formed in Amritsar. A few months ago a body of militia was formed in Lahore but this does not seem to have been anything more than an electioneering device of Dr. Satyapal and when the Congress general elections were over, the militia went automatically out of existence. There appears to have been no serious attempt to form a provincial organisation although Dr Kitchlew is known to be keen to get Congress volunteers going again.[101]

It is instructive to see what the politicians were minded to teach volunteers who came forward to serve in these informal new militias. They were subjected to a training as much political as physical. Such initiatives added new tensions to the already strained atmosphere of a Punjab which was at the cusp of war.

> A Central Volunteers Training Camp was opened at Lahore on the first of February. The training, which was to last a fortnight, included the use of the lathi and lectures on political and economic subjects and twenty-two volunteers did the course. The intention is that these volunteers should return to their districts to train other volunteers on the same lines.[102]

By 1939, every political party in the Punjab apart from the Unionists had set up some sort of a para-military organisation, whether militia or 'fauj', of its own.[103]

Indeed, the communist Sohan Singh Josh proclaimed:

> They say that we Punjabis are a martial race and so we must join the British Army. I say yes we are a fighting race. We have gone to battle in the past and we shall do in the future – but not for Rs 18 – a month, as mercenaries. We shall fight as soldiers, the battle of India's freedom.[104]

This stance, contrived to meet the special conditions of the Punjab, challenged not only the very base of the imperial state but also the central tenets of Gandhian nationalism, while reasserting a powerful provincial pride in martial traditions which its people had nurtured over two centuries and more. According to the radical line argued, it was important now for the Punjab to learn the lessons of the past and deploy its martial talents to fight the real enemy – colonialism. 'At Nowshera Punawan, Baba Kesar Singh told his audience not to repeat the mistake made by Gandhi "and people of his ilk" who, during the Great War, urged the Indians to join the Army and fight for British imperialism.'[105] The left also used veterans from the Great War to dissuade Punjabis from yet again becoming

cannon fodder for the imperial regime. 'Some Communist leaders are spreading anti-recruitment propaganda and disaffection in the army through military pensioners.'[106] Punjabi women exhorted their sisters not to lose their sons and brothers on the battlefields of Europe.[107] The Naujawan Bharat Sabha developed a not altogether new line in which joining up for the King Emperor was described as a badge of shame, not of honour. *Izzat* or honour, of which colonial officials had previously made much to elicit loyalty and encouragement, was now turned into an effective political weapon against the British by the radical Naujawan Bharat Sabha and anti-recruitment agitators.

A central plank of the radical agenda was to challenge the legitimacy of colonial rule, cast doubt on its values, shame collaborators and loyalists and break the ties between the British and their subjects by emphasising national pride over and above any material gain that joining imperial armies could bring. Even the financial benefits of being soldiers of the King were questioned by broadcasting how little an Indian sepoy was paid compared with his white counterparts – a black death was deemed to be worth much less than a white life.[108]

It is difficult to assess how effective this anti-recruitment drive was. But the large numbers who came to the anti-recruitment meetings in the Punjab suggest that at least the message had begun to reach a wide audience, despite the undoubted and continued success of mass enlistment in the province, to which the Unionists and the Raj were committed.[109] From 1937 onwards, anti-recruitment meetings were held in Hoshiarpur, Jullunder, Amritsar, Ludhiana and Lahore. Between April and August of that year, thirteen meetings were convened; in September alone, there were twenty-five meetings. In November, the League Against Fascism and War was set up in Lahore. Its members were mainly communists and Congress socialists, but some Ahrars also joined the League. As one intelligence report stated, 'Since the 1st April, 115 persons have made anti-war speeches at 71 meetings in various parts of the province.'[110] 'The infection is spreading and it looks as if "not a single man, not a single pie" is going to be the principal slogan in the Punjab in the days to come.'[111] The Punjab's radicals had learnt to calibrate their language to meet specific Punjabi concerns, grievances and fears and it had an impact, the hundreds of thousands of soldiers recruited and the many crores raised in the Punjab notwithstanding.

Another aspect of the radical assault was the way it deployed religion and religious grievances to try to dissuade Punjabis from joining the army, another departure from the politics of the 1920s when the Naujawan Bharat Sabha had remained resolutely secular. Ten years later, the radicals tailored their speeches to the particular concerns of particular communities. To win over Muslims, much capital was made of the deteriorating situation in Palestine and the desecration of Mecca. 'M. Mohammed Sharif, speaking at Hoshiarpur, remarked that as the English had opened fire on the Muslims at Mecca, no true Muslim should render them any help in times of war.'[112] Linking up with the pro-Congress reformist Ahrar party was another development which greatly worried the British: 'The Ahrars have joined in, with Palestine as moral justification for their opposition to British imperialism.' Anti-recruitment rhetoric stirred up communal discontent and helped to turn it against the Raj rather on internecine strife.

For their part, the Ahrars tried to persuade Punjabi Muslims to ally with the Congress by taking up specifically Muslim grievances against the British. Interestingly, the Ahrars were ready to play a different hand in their game in different political arenas. A case in point was when the Amritsar Municipal Committee decided to increase the percentage of seats reserved for Muslims from 40 per cent to 49 per cent. In fact, population statisitcs suggested they were entitled to 51 per cent. So the Ahrars condemned the Muslim members of the Committee for failing to protect the interests of their community.

> The local Majlis-i-Ahrar has taken Muslim members of the Committee to task for demanding only 49% instead of the 51% to which they are entitled on the basis of population and they also criticised the Sikhs, their allies under Congress, for condemning the Muslims because they supported the new decision. This attitude of the Ahrars is attributed to the impending bye-election in the Amritsar City Muslim Constituency which Chaudhri Afzal Haq proposes to contest.[113]

All of this shows how every group in the Punjab's complex political landscape had to adapt to the new conditions created by the 1935 Act. Different circumstances and different constituencies demanded different agendas; and in an era when winning votes mattered, the balance between voters and their concerns and their erstwhile leaders and patrons was changing, with the latter no longer always retaining the whip hand .

The radical left also attempted to woo Hindus. The former Meerut prisoner Kedar Nath 'Red Shirt' Sehgal directly appealed to the Hindu reformist sect, the Arya Samaj, urging them to defy the authorities and campaign against Punjabi participation in the war;[114] and, as part of the drive to boycott recruitment of soldiers for war, he demanded the destruction of an abattoir, bringing cow protection into play.[115] Communists and socialists were entering zones of political expression and action they had previously left alone. They broke new ground by appealing to a range of people who had hitherto been beyond their reach, casting their appeals in terms of community and religious identities rather than class. In this enterprise, their most important success was with Sikhs. Indeed most of the anti-recruitment meetings took place in the central tracts of the Punjab, where many Sikhs lived. Concerned by the fact that Sikhs were joining these radical groups, Craik told the Viceroy:

> I had a report from one of my officers a day or two ago that a Recruiting Officer, who was endeavouring to recruit 80 Jat Sikhs in the Amritsar district, was actually able to recruit only about 12. This poor response was probably due to the effects of secret anti-recruitment propaganda conducted by the local communists, etc.[116]

Radicals were also found present and active at annual fairs and melas held up and down the province. These occasions gave communists and socialists a chance

to peddle their wares, suggesting a growing synergy between the radical left and the people – as the ideologies recoined, the political leaders were fish now swimming in popular waters.

> At a socialist conference held during the Chhappar Fair in the Ludhiana district, there was a lot of seditious speaking and the speeches are now under examination . . . Communist and socialist leaders continue to make use of all sorts of meetings for the propagation of their particular cults. Permission was reluctantly given to some agitators to address a meeting during the Guru Nanak Saradh festival at Kartarpur in the Gurdaspur district on the 9th. They tried to hold a second meeting but were refused permission.[117]

In general, these festivals were an excellent opportunity for putting out the radical message because they were central events in village life. They gave the left a chance to influence and woo people who would not normally have heard what they had to say.[118] The radicals also organised their own fairs, which more often than not were devoted to the celebration of past martyrs and in this way they began to create a popular following for their own myths and legends:

> In the Fortnightly Report for the 2nd half of November, 1938, reference was made to the commemoration at Sorabah in the Ludhiana district of the death of Kartar Singh, who was executed for his part in the 1914/15 Lahore Conspiracy Case. On the 23rd of March the notorious terrorist Bhagat Singh's death anniversary was celebrated at 6 places in the province, the most important being the Martyr Fair at his village Khatkar Kalan in the Jullunder district.[119]

Another interesting development was how the Punjab left revived another old tradition, widely practised during the time of Ranjit Singh (and subsequently in British times too), of 'diwans' or forums where popular grievances could be publicly aired and resolved. For example, one report stated, 'Under the auspices of the Doaba Diwan diwans were held at Kiratpur and Anandpur in the Hoshiarpur district.'[120] Just as the British before them, the left realised the advantages of maintaining and cultivating local political traditions and being seen to do so as the would-be guardians of the people.

But it remained the case that the dominant players in this battle for hearts and minds of the Punjabis were still the Unionists and their allies in the Punjab administration. They did not remain passive bystanders in face of this radical rhetoric and assault. Sikander Hyat Khan took steps to contain the Congress–radical opposition and most of his measures had some success. Already in September 1937, Sikander had convened a 'Unity' conference to which he invited luminaries from all political parties in the Punjab, including critics of the Unionists, such as Dr Satyapal, Dr Bhargava and Mian Iftikaruddin. Satyapal declined the invitation, but interestingly Bhargava attended, a fact which dismayed Hindu and Muslim Congress members alike who argued that, by going to the conference, Bhargava

had given legitimacy and recognition to a government that was anti-secular, communal and separatist. In retaliation, Sikander Hyat Khan openly attacked Dr Satyapal in the Punjab press for not attending the conference, which added further fuel to the war of words between the Satyapal and Bhargava factions in the Punjab Congress. Sikander had played his hand cleverly. He knew how Bhargava was using the 'communal' issue to rally support and he capitalised on the divisions within the provincial Congress.

> The decision of the working Committee has provided them with a handle to condemn and censure us. Even in spite of your valuable arguments, I must confess that I can't reconcile these two things viz that on the one hand Dr Gopi Chand should preside at the Sub Committee of that Conference and on the other, arrests, prosecutions, lathi charges etc should be the order of the day. I deem myself unfortunate that I can't appreciate the view point of the Working Committee that any unity is to be restored by Sir Sikander an avowed reactionary and a confirmed communalist. This conference will last as long as his Ministry and its real motive is to counteract the nationalist activities of the Congress.[121]

The tactic of the Unity Conference shows, above all, the mounting concern among Unionists about the growing opposition it faced after the 1937 elections. The Unionist ministry also used more conventional methods to curb its opponents, whether harassment or surveillance by police. Indeed the police went so far as verbally to insult and even physically assault Kabul Singh and Mian Iftikaruddin on several occasions.[122] The police told Kabul Singh he could not interview under-trial prisoners because he himself was on a 'blacklist'.[123] Constant harassment of radical leaders meant that these dissenters were left in no doubt that the Punjab government would, given the slightest excuse, take away their 'liberties'. As early as July 1937, a Congress Municipal Commissioner and Kisan Secretary of the Ludhiana Congress Socialist Party was arrested because he spoke against the government during the Ludhiana District Board Elections.[124] Every week, the Punjab Civil Liberties Union reported a number of similar cases, which reminded radicals that the state had lost neither its will nor its capacity to wield the big stick. The troublesome MLA Hari Singh was jailed in February 1939, seven months before the outbreak of war;[125] and when war broke out, many of the tensions which had been kept under the surface in peacetime came to the fore. The government, already worried about the anti-recruitment drive, now warned the peoples in the tracts which supplied troops that their privileges were at risk if they succumbed to communist propaganda; Hoshiarpur district (a hotbed of militancy which had elected four radicals) was the particular focus of government's disciplinary attention.

> I have just returned from a short tour to the Hoshiarpur and Gurdaspur districts . . . Hoshiarpur was a district which had in recent years given a good deal of trouble owing to communist elements, especially among the Sikh

> population, . . . I am glad to say that . . . there has been a marked improvement in the state of this district. A large number of political prosecutions have been instituted, practically all of which hitherto decided have ended in conviction and substantial sentences . . . I gave a stern warning as to the damage that had been caused in this district by the dissemination of communist doctrines and drew particular attention to the danger that if such dissemination persisted, it might be difficult for the district to maintain its regular flow of loyal and trustworthy recruits.[126]

By deploying the Defence of India Rules and arresting its opponents, the government succeeded in stifling some of the protest. By 22 October 1939, over 150 politicians in the Punjab were in jail,[127] and by February of the next year, with war in full flow, the headcount had risen to 404. June 1940 saw the incarceration of another four score 'leftists' in the province, including some of those who had been elected to the Punjab Legislative Assembly. By now the Punjab led the rest of India in having the largest number of communists and socialists in its jails, statistics which highlight the anxieties of the rulers in a strategically important province, rather than evidence that the Punjab had become particularly radical. In the Punjab, anyone daring to disseminate anti-war propaganda was incarcerated, and this included the leader of the Ahrar Party.[128]

By 1940, the radical socialist MLAs, almost to a man, had been thrown into jail on the grounds of their anti-war and anti-recruitment activities. Sikander defended these arrests in the House as not only necessary to win the war but also essential measures which had to be taken to curb the communist threat.[129] He was simply parroting the refrain of the British, who made much of the gulf between communism on the one hand and true Punjabi values and interests on the other.

> One of the places I have visited on my recent tour was Ludhiana, where I received addresses of welcome from the Municipal Committee, the district Board and the District Soldier's Board. In the course of my reply to these addresses I took the opportunity of warning these bodies against the insidious dissemination of communistic ideas in the district. I particularly stressed the point that communism aims at the abolition of all religious sanctions, as I believe that this [is] the aspect of communism which is most open to attack and which, if properly realised, will be most likely to deter the Punjab peasantry from adopting communism as their political creed.[130]

In retrospect, the radical left in the Punjab had enjoyed a relatively short-lived period when, as MLAs, they could operate openly. Like bees, they stung and then they seemed to have died. Their halcyon days in which they were able to question some of the fundamental assumptions of Punjab politics were quickly cut short. But, in this brief interlude, politicians on the left in the Punjab learnt the arts of parliamentary procedure and had introduced their own brand of democracy into the bastions of an establishment which they had first attempted to storm in the elections of 1937.

The years 1935 to 1939 thus represent a period of transition both in the governance of the Punjab and in the history of communism in that province. It was also a time of transformation because, for the first time, these years saw communists accepting, and working within, the constitutional framework constructed by the Raj. This fact may not seem so significant today, when communists freely join the electoral process and form governments in India and elsewhere. But, for Josh and his fellows, fighting elections gave them a novel legitimacy, far removed from their past life when they were incarcerated in dingy prison cells, evidence of the unambiguous opportunism of radicals ready and prepared to deploy any weapons or strategy that was at hand in the grand enterprise of ridding India of the British.[131]

The 1930s began with radicals in jail and that formative decade ended with them back in prison from where they had started. But in the interim, radicals had played a part within a constitutional frame. Men formerly dismissed as seditious jailbirds had had their moment both in the Assembly and outside it, and had used these new opportunities to continue their assault against their colonial masters in a new forum and for a while they had to have their say without having to operate by stealth. Communism in the Punjab had come out of the shadows.

4 The contradictions of communism during the Second World War

> He must arouse patriotism not by shouting against the Government but by appealing to all patriots to unite. Patriotism in a negative sense (anti-Government hatred) is already there and it by itself only lends to helplessness: 'the blasted Government is there but what can we do' type of argument. Existing patriotism needs being activated through the positive appeal for unity and call for constructive effort to save our people, and thus our patriotism will get a positive democratic content.[1]

> The Communists were only Russian patriots who were unreliable, undependable and who betrayed and stabbed the country in the back in her hour of need. The communists do not work in the interests of the country but according to the dictates and commands of the Russian Government. As a nationalist I believe it will be in the best interest of India to maintain friendly relations with Russia but you should not permit agents of a foreign power to work, grow and prosper in our country.[2]

War, so the truism goes, is the mother of change; it upsets existing political structures and precipitates economic and social upheavals. So not surprisingly the Second World War had a far-reaching impact upon the British in India. Indeed it brought about the end of empire[3] and has much to do with the unseemly haste with which the British divided and quit India.[4] This chapter looks at the impact of war upon the organised left in the wartime Punjab.

For the left, 1942 proved to be a point of no return. The communists clashed openly and irreconcilably with Congress over the Quit India campaign, creating a breach which carried over to India after independence and explains why the communists were so generally vilified for so long by mainstream nationalists.[5] By deciding to shun the Quit India movement, the communists were seen to acknowledge their fealty to a foreign power in damaging ways which trumped their commitment to the nationalist cause. This proved to be such a powerful charge against the left that they have tended to draw a veil over the events of 1942,[6] not least in the Punjab.[7] In consequence, the distinctive history of the left in the Punjab has not been studied and this omission is a characteristic of most recent accounts of the period.[8] The war had a huge, and atypical, impact on the Punjab,

which has not been adequately investigated. This final chapter is a modest attempt to redress the balance.

An outcome of the failure to study the Punjab communists during the war is that they are seen to have been traitors to the national cause in much the same way as communists were regarded in other parts of India. Yet communist cadres in the Punjab interpreted, and reworked, central directives in order to suit their regional imperatives. In the elections of March 1946, communists in the Punjab did badly, a direct result, in the view of some commentators, of their failure to back the Quit India movement. The assumption underlying such a viewpoint is that radical politics could do well only when they joined forces with Congress. The truth is different. In the war and its aftermath, politicians of all persuasions made alliances of convenience and took pragmatic decisions in order to position themselves to the best advantage in the endgame. In the last elections held before independence, the Communist Party of India was unique among political organisations in backing candidates from both the Congress and the Muslim League in the cause of Indian unity. In consequence, they put up fewer candidates of their own and this was one reason which helps to explain their poor showing at the polls in 1946. The war also forced the communists openly to defy Congress. One consequence was that the left in the Punjab took up the Sikh cause with a new vigour, since the Akalis were seen as more committed to self-determination than either the Congress or the League. This particular strategy did little to improve the chances of the communists at the polls; but it did give them a distinctive political role independent of Congress. It also gave politicians in power the opportunity to manipulate popular perceptions about communism for their own ends. Just as the British had done, Indian politicians now found it convenient to brand communism as 'alien' and its supposed puppet-masters as 'outsiders'.[9] For their part, Punjab communists continued to try to hold high the twin banners of nationalism and of secularism in the region. In contrast to Congress in the Punjab, which, its rural forays notwithstanding, remained mainly urban and deeply divided between its radical left wing and a communal right wing, the communists showed a greater awareness of national issues such as the Bengal famine on the other side of India. Whatever the consequences of its break with Congress over the Quit India movement, communists saw that decision as necessary if their distinctive construct of a secular nationalism of all India was to succeed.

Wartime imperatives and 'People's War'

For much of 1942, the fortunes of Britain at war were at their lowest ebb. Malaya, Singapore and Burma had been lost to the Japanese, who were coming ever closer to India. The big change which war brought to the Communist Party of India, 'godless and barbaric' though it was still seen to be, was that it was now declared legal by the government for a whole host of powerful reasons, domestic and international. In making the party legal, the government had to take account of the potential impact of this decision on the army in India. In February 1942, almost half that army was still being recruited from the Punjab, and this fact cast

a heavy shadow over British policy towards Indian politicians, whether communist or Congress.[10] But, because the communists of the Soviet Union had become Britain's allies in the war against fascism, the British had now to take a different line towards the communist party in India.[11]

This tectonic shift in official attitudes towards communists began in 1939, when the first signs of a grudging change of heart can be found in some forward-looking expressions of the official mind. The view that prevailed was that:

> it is not so much the activities of communists and the direct influence of the illegal Communist Party which call for serious attention as the insidious and seditious manner in which they are able to penetrate other organisations, and the indirect hold which communist teachings exert over the national movement.[12]

Another report, written in 1942, hints at the beginning of an awareness that the party was both disciplined and increasingly mature. The reckless youth of yesterday had grown up: 'Despite the dubious antecedents of many members, the Party is nevertheless an admirably centralised, largely disciplined body and under its zealous and none too scrupulous leaders, is hardly likely to plunge headlong into any premature and ill-conceived revolutionary movement.' But the party was still perceived as dangerous: 'It is as purveyors of disaffection, through its propaganda literature, that the Communist Party chiefly merits the unceasing vigilance of the authorities.' The question was whether their potential contribution to the war effort outweighed these dangers; and it is likely that the influence of the communists over kisan sabhas was what tipped the balance in the decision to legalise the party: 'there is no question but that the communists have the whip in hand in Bengal, Andhra, Kerala and the Punjab where the kisan movement is comparatively more developed.'[13] So, just as the Punjab government was the first to criminalise and jail communists in 1934, eight years later, it was also the first provincial government to legalise the party. Their fear of Punjab peasants, increasingly strong Kisan movements and concerns about recruitment to the army played an important part in bringing about this significant volte-face.

Government's equivocations were reflected in the communists' ambivalence about the way forward, particularly evident in their debate about a 'People's War.' Backing the People's War was not simply a question of slavishly following the Soviet lead. The memoirs of the Malayali leader, K. Damodaran, are evidence of the vigorous debate on this question in communist circles, both inside and outside jail:[14]

> In prison controversies started on whether or not our line (backing the People's War) was correct. Then the Soviet Union was invaded by the Nazi armies. Our controversies became even more heated. Professor K. B. Krishna who was with us in jail wrote a set of theses developing the People's War line and advocating that now everything had changed and that communists should drop their anti-imperialist activities and their opposition to war. I wrote a

> set of counter theses . . . The majority of the communists inside the prison supported my line and only a tiny majority was in favour of the People's War theses. Then some months later we heard that the British party had changed its line and that Moscow was in favour of the change. Outside the jail, the party secretary P. C. Joshi who was initially one of the strongest opponents of the People's War line had to change his line and start using his oratorical skills to convince party members, and also the masses, of the importance of helping the war effort.[15]

In the Punjab, Josh had a similar experience in Deoli Jail. In his case, the main concern of the communists was how to unite the various left groups inside the prison rather than whether or not to back the People's War.[16]

Communists in India were not of one mind in espousing the notion of a People's War. The 'pros' and 'cons' of fighting fascism and allying with the imperialists in doing so were fiercely debated. But in the Punjab the communists saw the good arguments for joining in a war against the Axis powers.[17] Punjab communists, and indeed communists throughout India, seemed to have had a mind of their own on this issue, and were not willing simply to accept orders from abroad. As early as February 1942, communists pressed publicly for a pro-war policy at the India Trades Union Congress conference, and they had the support of many union members, despite Nehru's opposition:

> The communists, handicapped by the absence of capable leaders in jail, were faced with a strong combination of Socialists and Congressites with Nehru to add the prestige and influence of his prestige and personal advocacy. Despite his opposition the communists while faring badly in the actual elections, managed to secure 60% of the votes on the war issue and their strength made it impossible to carry the delegates with them in a clear cut victory for non-cooperation in the war. On balance the various meetings held tend to demonstrate the existence of an increasing strong section of Labour in favour of cooperation in the war effort.[18]

The communists had set up a 'Soviet Aid Campaign' well before they formally registered their stance towards a 'People's War'.[19] Since labour leaders in the main backed the war, communists had to defer to their principal constituents.

Political Punjab at war

British imperatives in the Punjab during the war were straigforward. The province had to be kept politically stable to avoid endangering recruitment and food supplies. This meant curbing 'Hindu' Congress influence over the Sikhs in the central tracts and over Muslim Jats in the west. Concessions to the Congress were unlikely to go down well with these groups. Sikander Hyat Khan, who ran the Unionist ministry until his untimely death in December 1942, had two main aims:

one was loyally to support the war effort and the other was to ensure that the Punjab wartime economy prospered and the Punjab's leading role in the British Indian army continued unchallenged:

> If anybody attempts to undermine the present supremacy of the Punjab in the Army we would fight and fight to the last ditch, if need be . . . it is not perhaps generally realised that about Rs four and a half crores – a sum which is equal to the total amount of land revenue of the province – is received annually by the Punjab soldiers in the form of salaries and pensions and but for this it would be impossible for thousands of families to make both ends meet.[20]

Sikander understood how important the army was to the prosperity of the Punjab. He openly confessed that:

> the question of war and recruitment was of greater importance in the Punjab as it was the Punjab which would have to defend India in the event of an invasion. It was therefore his duty to prevent violation of this law. He would not spare even his son or the biggest personality in the land in doing so.[21]

The government took any threat to the special position of Punjabis in the Indian army very seriously. In July 1940, the Punjab assembly agreed, by a vote of ninety-one to forty-eight, to hold a session in camera to discuss the communist threat to the province. At this secret meeting held on 15 July, Sikander condemned revolutionaries and communists and called them 'un-Indian',[22] views not very different from those of Langford James, the chief prosecutor of the Meerut Conspiracy Case, eleven years before;[23] and one of Sikander's purposes in this attack was to rally support for the Unionists from the Shiromani Akali Dal, which also had no love for the communists.

The war proved to have mixed benefits for the Punjab. Recruits from the Punjab – still half of the total army – did well because they had employment in its ranks. Agriculturalists, who profited from rising grain prices, also did well out of the war. 'War brought to the fields of Punjab a time of unprecedented prosperity.'[24] But the countryside's gain was a loss for the towns. In towns, real wages went down and the cost of living and food in particular shot up, most dramatically between 1939 and 1941.[25] The government prohibited strikes, and in some industries, people lost jobs because of increasing retrenchment.[26] But the relative prosperity enjoyed by agricultural Punjab, in contrast to Bengal, which was ravaged by famine, is a striking commentary on how favoured this province was throughout the short century when it was under British rule.

But the cloud on the horizon was the future of the Punjab after the war, a Muslim-majority province in an independent India. This was the context in which the communal issue affected every aspect of politics of the Punjab, high and low, Hindu, Muslim or Sikh. In discussing Sikh recruitment to the army, one key report stated:

> The Sikhs present a somewhat separate problem from other classes. They are a separate, warlike community. In 1940 there was considerable anxiety over the Sikh situation and the number of recruits desired was difficult to obtain. One of the main reasons for this reluctance to enlist, as well as for the number of deserters which occurred, as was the current opinion that if Sikhs went overseas the lands and villages would be seized by the Mohammedans who were plotting to seize power in the Punjab. Sikhs were therefore wanted in India to protect the community against the Mohammedans. The Sikhs might welcome concessions to Congress if they did not involve concessions to the Muslim League.[27]

But what this analysis failed to acknowledge was the way in which anti-recruitment drives of the radicals had focused on central Punjab. Another feature was the extent to which all communities were tempted to acquire and hoard arms to defend themselves in the coming time of troubles which the British withdrawal from India presaged.

> Deeply symptomatic of the widespread spirit of communal mistrust in the event of internal disorder is the mushroom growth of communal defence organisations and the feverish attempts to find arms. These defence organisations are at present mainly confined to the towns but in some places are spreading to the countryside. Advertised as organisations for the help of the people in the event of air raids or enemy attacks they are in reality communal volunteer bodies intended for the protection of the communities or sects whose names they carry.[28]

In the meantime, Congress sought to ally with the Sikhs even in the face of complaints to the High Command from the rank and file of the party in the Punjab that such an alliance would water down Congress's distinctive identity in the province. As Akali influence over Congress in the Punjab grew, with Bhargava standing down to allow the Akali leader, Sampuran Singh, to be the formal leader of the opposition in the Punjab Legislative Assembly, this underlined deep changes in the Punjab Congress. It also highlighted the continued and profound weakness of the Congress in the province. However, the Akali leadership itself was fractured into many factions and all of them were intent upon playing complex games of their own. In 1940, Sampuran Singh denounced the war effort, demanding that India be granted independence as a condition of supporting the Allies. However, in September 1940, both Sampuran Singh and Master Tara Singh went to an all-parties Sikh rally which called for greater efforts by the Sikhs to aid the British in the war, influenced, it seems likely, by fears that Sikhs might otherwise lose their dominant position in the army and hence their privileged political standing in the province. For his part, Sikander Hyat Khan also had reason to woo the Sikhs and succeeded in getting Baldev Singh's 'United Punjab Sikh Party'[29] on side, at least for the time being.

As one Congress report on the Punjab confessed, the most worrying aspect of these developments was the Punjab Congress's alliance with the Akalis:

> The Akali party is not a great believer in these activities [khadi and winning support of Muslims] but is anxious to capture the Congress machinery. This party is very well disciplined but the fear is that it owes allegiance, perhaps greater and more willing obedience to an exterior body which does not see eye to eye with the Congress in all subjects, and as this party is very influential in the present day Congress organisation therefore lies in danger . . . The president himself thinks he is a non-party man but the belief of the general public in the Punjab is that he has great leanings towards if not actually a man of the Communist Party. He told me that he had full confidence in himself to keep the various factions within their proper bonds till May, but he found in the meeting of the Working Committee that he was powerless and helpless to curb the communal tendencies in the Congressmen. That is the danger. The Akali organisation is certainly a sectarian body and many Congress members have joined Akali conferences where communal resolutions have been adopted.[30]

In this period, the Indian National Congress may have had some political successes outside the Punjab. But inside the province, it did badly, torn apart as the party chronically had been by perennial internal factions. This can be seen in 1940 in the Punjab's response to Gandhi's call for individual Satyagraha[31] and again in August 1942 to the Quit India movement. The Punjab hardly figured at all in the Quit India movement. Compared with other provinces, the Punjab remained relatively quiet throughout the movement.[32] As Glancy noted: 'The Congress in the Punjab is (I think), lukewarm about launching a movement and ill-equipped to do so, but disturbances in other parts of India can hardly fail to give rise to some degree of trouble in this province.'[33] Penderel Moon, an Indian Civil Servant based in Amritsar (and sympathetic to the Congress cause), wrote home to his father that:

> As I expected Gandhi's Civil Disobedience movement has not had much success in the Punjab; in fact everywhere it seems to have been set going with very little organisation or preparation. Consequently from the outset it simply took the form of sporadic hooliganism and sabotage . . . no mass movement or demonstrations.
>
> The Punjab Congress had very little control over its undisciplined party members and many in the Punjab questioned diktats from the High Command, to refuse to help the war effort. Bhim Sen Sachar, an up-and-coming local Congress leader, argued that Congress MLAs should remain in the Punjab Legislative Assembly despite orders from the centre to pull out, since it was one of the few places in the Punjab where their political message had a hearing. He asked Maulana Azad, the President of the All India Congress Committee, to reconsider the Working Committee's decision of 16 January 1941[35] which ordered Congress MLAs not to attend the assembly:

> The party reiterates its opinion that in the absence of a general boycott of the legislatures, absence of the members of the congress party from the

> Punjab Assembly is detrimental to the Congress cause in the province. By this absence even after the suspension of the Satyagraha the party has already gone down considerably in the estimation of the large body of its constituents. What the constituents don't understand – and which we equally fail to comprehend – is the anomalous position of the congress . . . They believe that in the present critical times in any case, certain things 'need' to be said publicly and forcibly and the Chamber is the best place, where it could be said effectively.[36]

In much the same vein, the Gujranwala Congress Party in the municipality agreed in April 1941, with great reluctance, to boycott the local Municipal Council, but complained that: 'in case the Congress Party is made to leave their seats the pro government people in the committee would be at liberty to have anything passed or done which might prove fatal to the Congress cause as well as to the comforts of the public.'[37] This shows how unwilling Congress in the Punjab was to toe the party line and efforts to make it do so led to complaints that the High Command paid no heed to what Congress on the ground in the Punjab wanted. So the reaction at headquarters was that the High Command yet again despaired of its Punjabi followers and in their turn continued to feel that the centre ignored their particular concerns.

For his part, Dr Satyapal, one of the best-known leaders of the Punjab Congress and founder of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha, refused to toe the party line on recruitment, made pro-war propaganda and in effect took the opportunity now to bow out of Punjab politics,[38] resigning as an MLA and giving up his Congress membership in July 1941.[39] The reality was that, without support from Akalis or radical politicians, Congress had little prospect of standing or support in the Punjab. When Punjabis finally faced the stark prospect of Partition, this would change, a change which proved to little and too late. But, in the early 1940s, Congress in the Punjab had been reduced yet again to a host of petty warring factions, an uninfluential rump which failed to speak with a united voice or indeed represent the people of the province, or any substantial section of Congress. One by one, each Congress faction which had decided to take part in the anti-recruitment movements of the late 1930s now distanced itself from the campaigns because of the worsening war situation. Six months before Gandhi launched the Quit India movement, the working committee of the Ahrars declared:

> While adhering to the decision of the 11th Sept 1939 [to refuse to help Government in the war effort] they tabooed civil disobedience. The resolution in fact prohibited all form of civil disobedience on any account whatsoever. This decision was taken in view of the tense situation in the country arising out of nearness of the war theatre.[40]

In August 1942, the Ahrar leaders again stressed that:

> A reign of terror has been established in the country by the action of the Government and a section of the Indian people. This Working Committee

> finds itself unable to support the violence of either party and whereas it wants to impress on its countrymen the fact that desperate injury to lives and property is not approved of even by Gandhi jig and the other Congress leaders, it wants to impress on the Government also the fact that desperate shooting to control the situation and firing not only on excited crowds but even on people sitting in their buildings and creating peace through terrorisation cannot be useful either for Government or for world peace.
>
> Majlis-i-Ahrar has always stood for independence of India and other Islamic countries, but under the present critical circumstances it considers a civil disobedience in the zeal to help the allies or in the hope of welcoming the Axis powers not only unnecessary but also inadvisable.[41]

It is clear that in the Punjab communists were not the only politicians who took issue with the Quit India movement, and were uncomfortable about its purposes and its timing. In April 1942, the communists decided to change their strategy and immediately began to back the war effort. This led to the release of eight leading Punjabi communists, three months before the ban on the Communist Party of India was officially lifted. Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union, however, had a far-reaching impact upon the already fragile alliance between the Congress Socialists on the one hand and the communists in India on the other. The 'People's War' forced every radical politician to take a personal stand based partly on local imperatives and partly on a reading of the international situation. Choices were not based primarily on party loyalty, or even on some generalised anti-fascist sentiment. One consequence of the choices they had to make was that many communists and socialists were alienated from their erstwhile comrades for the rest of their lives. Indeed in the Punjab, some prominent communists such as Master Kabul Singh decided to take part in Quit India rather than follow the communist line, whereas the opposite was the case with some Congress leaders, Dr Satyapal amongst them, who shunned the Quit India movement.

A communist variant of nationalism

> We must defend our country against Japanese Imperialism. For us there is no retreat, no surrender. We must and will oppose Japanese Imperialism to the bitter end.[42]

After the invasion of Russia and Pearl Harbor the main thrust of communist policy was to fight the fascist ambitions of Germany and Japan. Prithvi Singh, a Ghadr detainee who had broken out of jail and had renounced Gandhian non-violence, portrayed the communists as better nationalists than Congressmen. This claim was made on the front page of the newspaper *People's War*. In favour of an aggressive nationalism that defended the 'motherland', he viewed Gandhi's approach as entirely inappropriate in the face of the Japanese threat:

> Recent war developments have shaken me as they have all patriots. I felt acutely uncomfortable when after the treacherous Hitler attack on the USSR

> I found Gandhiji virtually tarring the Soviets with the same brush as British Imperialism or German imperialism. The second shock came after Japan's entry into the war, when I saw that Gandhiji's policy of non-violence becomes the policy of practical non-resistance to the fascist enslaver, i.e. The death and destruction of our ancient nation. After deep thought I decided to part company with him.[43]

When Japan invaded Burma and Assam, this helped to concentrate Indian minds and led the communists in different local contexts to rethink their strategies. In Kerala, more distant from the eastern frontiers than Bengal for example, communists were more interested in agitating against landowners than rallying the comrades against the Japanese.[44] But it was generally true that combating the Japanese threat became the focus for appeals by communists to peasants and workers in the nationalist cause.

The communists are significant because they articulated an alternative nationalism to the Congress. They staked their political futures as purveyors of a more robust nationalism than Gandhi's, a construct which owed much to the Ghadr revolutionary example, the 'manly' resistance of Bhagat Singh and the martial traditions of the 'lions of the Punjab'. During the war, the first priority of the communists was to emphasise the dangers of fascism and to draw a distinction between the fascist threat and imperialism. They had to do this if they were not to be wholly rejected by their constituents, particularly given that the Japanese were hammering at the gates of India. As Sohan Singh Josh warned his fellows in the Legislative Assembly:

> It [fascism] is the younger brother of Imperialism. I will illustrate my point by quoting an example. A poor kisan once approached a snake charmer and asked the price of his snake. The kisan was astonished to learn from the snake-charmer that the smallest snake was the dearest and the biggest was the cheapest. 'Why' asked the poor kisan, 'should the smallest snake be sold at the highest price and the biggest at the cheapest rate? The case should be the reverse.' 'No,' said the snake-charmer. 'The smallest is the most venomous.' In the same way I want to tell the Honourable Minister of Finance that Fascism is the younger brother of Imperialism but it is more dangerous than the elder brother. Hence we should detest Fascism and hate it more than we hate Imperialism. Japan, Germany and Italy are the living examples of fascism. That it what we understand by the term fascism . . . We regard both Imperialism and Fascism as our enemies and we do not love any one of them. If Imperialism is bad, Fascism is worse.[45]

For Josh and his fellows on the left fascism was the big enemy. So, the intelligence officers noted, 'As a political party however they [the communists] stand alone in their open condemnation of Subash Chandra Bose and other Indian traitors',[46] underlining the unbending stand against fascism which most Indian communists took. Teja Singh Swatanter, another recently released Punjabi communist, also ranted and railed against fascism:

> Sir, if the arrest of Congress leaders and communists at such a critical hour when Japan is knocking at our door, is not Fascism, in effect, what else can it be? So far hundreds of patriots including the communists have been jailed. The Government is replying to the demand to self-determination of these patriots with repression and is thereby sabotaging the war of liberation . . . Once again Sir, I wish to bring this point home to the Honourable Premier who himself is not less than a Fascist in so far as he is carrying on a pro-Fascist policy by weakening the anti-Fascist forces . . . Our main accusation against this Government is that they are not doing what they can against the Fascist forces in this country. The police have made no attempt at tracking down the Fascists! . . . police officers themselves do not know whom they have to arrest. Without caring to know whether a person belongs to the Kisan Party, the Communist Party or the Congress Party, they are indiscriminately making wholesale arrests of all nationalist minded people they can lay their hands upon in the *ilaqas*.[47]

With this scattergun approach and a whiff of grapeshot, Swatanter aimed to kill as many birds as he could. He condemned the totalitarianism of the British colonial state, he pointed out its failure to tackle fascism inside the country and he made mock of the idiocies of the Indian police. From their position in the Legislative Assembly, Josh and Swatanter trumpeted the dangers of fascism. Swatanter also took his message to people in the countryside. One example reported by the police, is set out below:

> A Communist meeting attended by 3000 persons was held at Khera in the Amritsar district on the 9th of September . . . Speaking at this meeting Teja Singh Swatanter . . . He urged Indians to defend their country against Japanese aggression and to create feelings of hatred against the Japanese and Germans similar to those already entertained against the British.[48]

For their part, the British and their agents suspected that none of this was the real motive behind the pro-war stance of the communists. The Punjab police's conclusion was that:

> How far a policy of cooperation in war effort [is] open to considerable doubt. It seems most improbable that the majority of those whose guiding principle has always been hatred of the British ruler are likely to change their views, whatever may be the official policy of the Communist leaders.[49]

Another prominent feature of communist propaganda was its repeated and sometimes fawning expressions of warm gratitude to the Soviet Union for the sacrifices of the Soviet people in the cause of 'universal freedom'. A report in July 1943 on Nidhan Singh's speech, when he opened a communist exhibition in Lahore, informed the government:

> He stated that the Russians were fighting not only for their own freedom but for that of the entire world, and he exhorted all Indian people to emulate their example and to fight bravely for the freedom of the people of India and all Asiatic peoples.[50]

Standing shoulder to shoulder with Soviet Russia was, thus, the true path for Indian nationalism. In these ways, the communists tried, by exploiting Russian involvement in the war, to claim the high ground of nationalism. But they held back from directly attacking Congress at this juncture. In public, their rhetoric was deployed to support Congress. The communist manifesto, released in September 1942, appealed to the government to end repression, to lift its ban on Congress and to release Gandhi. They asked for a National Government to be set up which would include politicians from Congress and the Muslim League. This would promote 'unity' at the centre.[51] So it is clear that the radical left had decided that acceptance by the Congress and giving it their support would provide their movement with a necessary legitimacy. Directives from the CPI explicitly urged communists to regard 'their Congress membership cards' as 'a treasured possession of our national heritage, as a living inspiration to fight the battle of India's freedom shoulder to shoulder with our fellow patriots.'[52] This message was not lost on the comrades from the Punjab, as a circular issued by one Punjab communist cell shows:

> It is essential to concentrate on Congress recruitment so that the Communist Party may gain strength in the Congress and be in a position to oppose such Congressmen who aim at expelling the Communists from the Congress. Every comrade should with the help of Kisan workers try to establish his position in the Congress.[53]

Communists in the Punjab understood how important it was to maintain their links with Congress. In the past, they had benefited greatly from cooperating with Congress; and their introduction to legislative politics was mainly due to this collaboration. In October 1942, Sohan Singh Josh summarised these sentiments in an important speech in the Punjab Assembly:

> If anybody thinks that by imprisoning Congress leaders peace and tranquillity can be maintained in India, he is sadly mistaken. The Congress is a very powerful body. It is a body of patriotic people, although I think at present it is following a wrong policy . . . I am myself a member of the All India Congress Committee and I think that it is the only way in which we can obtain independence.[54]

Another speech reported by the police stated that the communists 'aimed at strengthening their hold on the country during the war by forming Kisan Committees and guerrilla Jathas and that if India was not liberated after the war, they intend to launch an armed revolution.'[55]

But the communists did not trust the military objectives of the British and for their part, eighteen months after communists were released, the Punjab police as agents of the Raj remained unconvinced of the genuineness of the communists and their attempts to make common cause with the Congress:

> Shortly after their release however the communists realised that they were not strong enough to continue a line of propaganda which was meeting with the hostility of the Congress and large sections of the public and which was giving them the reputation of being pro-British agents. This fact coupled with their natural anti-British bias has led to a deterioration in their war propaganda until it has now become, to a great extent, objectionable and, at times more likely to hinder the war effort than to help it.[56]

But for the time being, the communists had been let out of jail and were unlikely to be put back just yet. So they had a chance to speak out and to criticise the Punjab government, the war effort and indeed the dangers that Japan posed:

> Short of actual sedition, no pains were spared to undermine the confidence of the people in the Unionist Ministry and the present system of government, and to exploit local grievances, such as the failure of Government to construct a canal in the Doaba, shortage of iron agricultural implements, cement, kerosene oil and sugar.[57]

It is interesting how the communists always gave priority to local grievances of the Punjab. A report written in 1944, describing a provincial kisan conference, concluded that:

> Although the audiences were mainly illiterate and unable to follow many of the arguments put forward in support of the theories and proposals advanced and to that extent the effects of the conference are likely to be ephemeral, the general trend of the speeches must have left behind a feeling of disrespect for the Government in power and discontent with prevailing conditions, methods of administration and civil supplies, and have added to the power and popularity of the Punjab Kisan committee.[58]

This too was a time when the communists fostered links with the Kirti–Kisan movement which they had first forged while in jail. Despite wrangles over money and the usual factional disputes, communists and kirti–kisans alike had reason to join with each other to back the war effort against Japan:

> The attitude of the communists in Punjab towards the war and recruitment can be judged from the proceedings of their Provincial Kisan Conference held at Jandiala in the Jullunder district at the end of September. No speeches were made either for or against recruitment: and though Fascist aggression was denounced, the part played by the British was deliberately belittled and

> at times slanderously misrepresented. Throughout, the emphasis was on Russian achievements.[59]

The thrust of these efforts was to raise the level of political awareness among the peasantry, encouraging them to grow more food, while shifting some of the burdens of wartime India off the shoulders of the peasantry. At kisan conferences, through speeches and plays, they tried to promote peasant solidarity and sympathy for the millions who were dying of famine in Bengal. Money was collected for famine relief,[60] the idea being to demonstrate that the comparatively well-off peasants in the Punjab stood ready to make common cause with their less fortunate fellows in other parts of India.[61] S. G. Sardesai, a leading communist on the national stage, insisted that:

> It is the responsibility of the Party to take the initiative to solve the food crisis . . . as in the case of the national crisis, either the Party is able to come forward and forge peoples' unity for getting food, and fight disruption and Fifth Column activity which is coming in through the food crisis end, or the initiative is left in the hands of the bureaucracy to gamble with the fate of the nation, to intensify the national crisis and to open the door for Jap invasion.[62]

However, it was the party's theoretician, Gangadhar Adhikari, who saw in the Punjab the seeds of a resolution of the present difficulties which faced India. In a pamphlet written in 1944, *Food in the Punjab,* he reminded Punjabis of their patriotic responsibilities.

> The people and the patriotic parties and organisations of the Punjab – especially the Muslim League, Congress, the *Kisan Sabha* and the Communist Party – have an important role to play in the battle against the second famine. They must unite in food committees everywhere and rouse the people in the countryside and in the town to defeat the intrigues of the hoarder-profiteer and the corrupt official against the success of control and rationing in the Punjab.[63]

In these ways, the Punjab Kisan Committee more than doubled its membership from 56,000 in 1942 to nearly 136,000 in 1944,[64] mainly in the rural tracts of central Punjab. Ajeet Javed among others has argued that the actual growth of peasant support for the communists was even greater than these figures suggest.[65] Be that as it may, the communists were a hard act for Congress to follow in their effort at rallying the peasants of the Punjab:

> Congress workers of this province have little experience of rural work and can offer the kisans nothing which the communist haven't already promised them with far greater emphasis and persistence, so there is not much chance of Congress organising a *kisan sabha* successfully. Even the Akalis, who are the greatest rivals of the Communists in rural areas, cannot hold their own

> against the energy and the skill of the latter and have to fall back on the religious appeal to maintain their position.[66]

But with success came problems. As peasant agitation increased, so also did the danger of those who led it being put back into jail. The party's cycle of consolidation and contraction, of boom and bust, as the state responded to the communist challenge, remained the familiar pattern in the Punjab. In September 1946, the communists organised squads which marched from the districts of Amritsar and its neighbouring villages to destroy canal outlets built against the wishes of the local peasantry: 'The agitation started in July and lasted for nearly three months during which time over five hundred communists and peasants were arrested.'[67]

Another development was the increasing role of women in the radical movement. In 1943, the Women's Self Defence League was set up as a forum for women in anti-fascist campaigns.[68] Even Muslim women, more than 5000 it has been estimated, joined the movement, along with some 9000 women of other faiths. These women, who came from town and country alike, were attracted by the Punjab's particular brand of communism, and party meetings and conferences were no longer for men only.[69] 'Popular interest in the proceedings was also stimulated by sideshows and dramas staged by women Communist workers, depicting scenes from Russian guerrilla warfare and the Bengal famine.'[70] Tahira Ali, a student in Lahore, remembers how women gave their jewellery and helped to mend parachutes to aid the war effort.[71] Other associations affiliated to the communists, such as the Indian People's Theatre Association, also helped to bring the radical message by putting on popular plays to more demotic sections of the population which had previously been outside their ken.[72]

It is a commonplace among communists that their ideology and their party were not able to take a real hold in the Punjab because it had little industry and hence possessed only the most fledgling of proletariats.[73] But this misses the point. The Punjab had a few tanneries and textile mills, and some railway workshops, although compared with Bombay and Calcutta its manufactures were all quite minor. Admittedly, organised labour in the factories and mills of the Punjab was in consequence, small and weak, and so were its unions, particularly compared with those of some other more industrialised provinces. It followed that Punjab communists 'have not promoted strikes but have taken part in them when they appeared to be inevitable and when they considered that the labourers' cause was good and they saw a chance of extending their control over labour.'[74] The fundamental political fact remained that communists in the Punjab had to be pragmatic and muster support wherever they could find it, rather than slavishly following the directives of the party at the centre. In consequence, the Punjabi public were treated to local variants of communism rather than having to stick to some central party line: 'In early January, the Punjab Communists supported strikes in textile mills in Amritsar and Achhar Singh Chinna and others were arrested for objectionable speeches and for inciting picketers.'[75] That the railway unions, quiet during the war, launched a ferocious strike as soon as hostilities ended suggests at least tacitly they supported the war effort and for that reason were ready to damp

down their discontents while fighting continued. The communists of the Punjab were not merely pragmatic, they were cannily opportunist, as the first Punjab Mazdoor Conference organised by communists in 1942 reveals.[76] As a result, by 1943, communists in the Punjab had entrenched their influence among the railway unions. The work of Mirza Ibrahim and others led to an increase in the number of communist-organised unions from eight in 1941 to thirty-nine in 1944.

Contradictions in the demand for Pakistan

In 1942, the Communist Party of India took the crucially important decision to come to terms with the Muslim League. This had momentous consequences for the Punjab, where more than half of the population was Muslim. In 1942, the communists publicly declared that they accepted the Muslim League as the representative of the Muslim masses despite its elitist origins, and gave the League their stamp of approval as a force for national progress. According to party theorists, the Muslim League had a similar role to play to that of the Congress in determining India's future. The decision of the communists to support the Muslim League and to seek an alliance with it was not a matter of putting into practical effect Stalin's general theory of what constituted a nation. According to Stalin,

> A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of the common possession of four principal characteristics, namely: a common language, a common territory, a common economic life, and a common psychological make-up manifested in common specific features of national culture.[77]

By these four tests Pakistan would not have got across the starting line. Rather, the decision to woo the Muslim League reflected the extent to which, on the all-India stage, the Muslim League had succeeded in becoming the party which could claim to be a dominant player, speaking for Muslims. Jinnah's sucess in that role had particular consequences for the Punjab. In the first edition of *People's War*, Prithvi Singh wrote:

> I saw that the first requisite to save the country today is all in national unity, unity of all patriots and their organisation – above all of the Congress and the Muslim League. The more we succeed in forging our own unity the nearer will come the establishment of National Government.[78]

Others, Gangadhar Adhikari and Sajjad Zaheer among them, thought that the Muslims of the Punjab and Sind had the right to secede from an Indian union. Adhikari set out his argument as follows:

> The demand for Pakistan, if we look at its progressive essence, is in reality the demand for the self-determination and separation of the areas of Muslim nationalities of the Punjab, Pathans, Sind, Baluchistan and of the eastern provinces of Bengal . . . The National Congress must recognise this right

> of these Muslim nationalities as of the other nationalities of which India is composed. Why? Because free India must be based on the principle of equality of the various nationalities. That alone would guarantee united India – a voluntary federation of autonomous national states. Muslim peoples and their leaders are not bent upon separation. Grant them the right of equality and you create the basis for national unity today, and for greater and more glorious unity of India tomorrow . . . The grant of this right, including the right of separation, dispels distrust and acts as the strongest unifying bond here and now. The object is to unite, not to partition off . . . The grant of the right of separation should not be confused with the actual expediency of the exercise of this right in this or that particular case.[79]

But the communist policy of supporting the League, an avowedly communal party, was an uneasy bedfellow of the old line that communism was, above all, a force against communalism and for secularism. It also did not fit well with the virtual merger in practice of the communists with the predominantly Sikh Kirti Kisan Sabha. But Adhikari and others stuck to their view that independent India could not be the

> one nation–one language idea, draped in Hindu imagery, [that] has been carried over from the past into the consciousness of our modern nationalist movement. It persists even today at a time when the reality of our national development has become quite different at a time when this development is taking the form more and more clearly of a multi-national pattern.[80]

Such guidance as came from the centre was that communists in the Punjab should use whatever influence they possessed to persuade the Muslim League to make common cause with the party, and this in its turn led the Punjab administration to conclude: 'So much has been written about the League in this issue [of the Communist organ, *People's War*] that one might easily take this as a Muslim League paper.'[81] But the two parties in the Punjab – communists and League – had in fact quite different agendas. The communists wanted to ally with the League in the cause of national unity, whereas for the League:

> Mumtaz Daultana, one of the League's young progressives, is known to be favourable to the communists and he is reported to have asked them to help the League workers in a membership drive in the Punjab. It seems therefore that the Punjab Muslim League is prepared to take advantage of the communists in their hitherto unsuccessful campaign against the Unionist ministry.[82]

In June 1944, the League at last responded to the communist overtures. Paradoxically this meant that Danial Latifi and Abdullah Malik, both prominent Lahore-based communists, now resigned from the Communist Party and became members of the League. In the same year, the provincial administration noted that communists in the Punjab had joined forces with the League in contrast to other parts of the country where relations between communists and the League

continued to be strained: 'Elsewhere in India they [Communists] appear to have no hope of rapprochement with the League.'[83] Two developments call to be noted. Communists in the Punjab who happened to be Muslim played a part in giving the League standing on the all-India stage, not very different from that achieved by the Congress. At the same time, by joining the League, they had some influence on its policy from within. The fact that Danial Latifi drafted the Punjab Muslim League Manifesto in 1944, which declared that the League favoured universal adult franchise, showed that Punjab communists, or perhaps erstwhile communists, had now become quite serious players in this rapidly changing political arena. Yet in the Punjab, the League needed the communists as much as the communists needed the League. The League's membership was still so tiny that communist support was crucial if they were to make any showing at all the grassroots and in elections. As late as 1944, the Ahrars refused to join the Muslim League. At an Ahrar conference in June of that year, their leader, Maulana Mazhar Ali Azhar, was reported to have accused Jinnah of double standards:

> He said that Mr Jinnah only wanted to fight for obtaining Ministries for the League. He referred to Congress ministers and said that Mr Jinnah did not want to court imprisonment. He criticised the Muslim League resolution about help in the war.
>
> He said that Malik Khizar Hyat Khan should be credited with consistency since he had declared that after the war he would ask for rights for his community, in view of their active help in war, whereas Jinnah wanted to create a split among Muslims. Continuing, he said that Mr Jinnah's mentality was clear from his readiness to approach the Viceroy with requests for Pakistan but was not prepared to write a letter of sympathy to Mahatma Gandhi on the death of his wife. Nor would he care to inquire after his health.[84]

Another momentous consequence of these developments was that Khizar Tiwana, who after Sikander's death led the Unionist government, was increasingly disinclined to fall in line with the League, realising the dangerous consequences for the Punjab and its precarious communal unity of Jinnah's (still unspecific) demand for Pakistan. Some Unionists such as Sikander's son, Shaukat Khan, and Mian Narullah did cross the floor, but Khizar held on to most of his Muslim support among the Unionists. Alliance with the communists notwithstanding, the League in the Punjab remained weak, which made it readier than it might otherwise have been to stick with this unlikely alliance with the radical left.

Not only did the communists attempt to make terms with the League, but party headquarters also now ordered instructed its members to try to infiltrate Sikh parties in the Punjab as well:

> [Communist] workers have been directed to make common cause with the progressive wing of the Akali Dal with a view to, where possible, infiltrate into the Shiromani Akali Dal, and to support the Muslim League in the hope of overthrowing the Unionist Ministry.[85]

Here the strategy of the Punjabi communists was to try to present themselves as being more Sikh than the Sikhs and more committed to Akali issues than the Akalis. For example, in 1943, the Sikh communist Sohan Singh Josh complained in the Punjab Assembly that wartime restrictions on providing tickets on the North Western Railway to allow Sikhs to travel to Nankana Sahib, an important shrine and point of pilgrimage for the community, 'interfered with the people's right to worship.' Not surprisingly, Khizar elicited a measure of ironic amusement among Assembly members by observing that he was 'glad and thankful that Mr Josh, a communist, still thought of God and the rights of worship!'[86] But these somewhat obvious moves to woo the Sikhs by espousing such a popular religious issue did not get the communists very far with the Sikhs. Sikhs as different from each other as Baldev Singh and Sampuran Singh had already condemned Congress politicians for giving their backing to the Rajagopalachari formula, a proposed all-India settlement between Hindus and Muslims which, they rightly feared, would leave Sikhs high and dry in their own province. The settlement called for the partition of the Punjab based on a Muslim majority 'Pakistan' in the west and a Hindu majority 'Hindustan' in the east of the province.[87] In fact, Sikh leaders who had hitherto been wont to squabble incessantly amongst themselves about how to deal with the Hindus, the Indian National Congress, the Unionists or the Muslim League, now belatedly saw the writing on the wall and came together under the banner of the All India Sikh Conference in August 1944 to ponder how to deal with the thorny demographic fact that they were everywhere, west and east alike, an awkward and scattered community and hence in dire straits if the Punjab was to be partitioned. Master Tara Singh, the most belligerent of the Sikh leaders, had been the driving force behind the conference: convening it he claimed that he had invited every individual and every organisation that had anything to do with Sikhism. But he also specifically made it clear that he had decided not to invite a single communist:

> Of course no invitation had been sent to any Communist because he declared with the approval of the Conference he did not regard Sikh communists to be Sikhs. That, he said, was because of the declaration made by the Sikh Communists which showed utter lack of faith in the tenets of Sikhism and the Gurus.[88]

Sikh communists reacted to this huge public snub by staging a conference of their own. Stating that they 'did not care that they were called atheists', their declared aim was to get the different communities to agree and they argued that Congress and Gandhi could be trusted to look after all the different and competing interests in India, the interests of the Sikh community included. Sardar Sarmukh Singh Jhabal, moving the main resolution at this alternative conference, expressed his confidence in Gandhi's leadership:

> Today the Sikhs were faced again with a critical situation. Outwardly alluring terms were being offered to keep away the Sikhs from doing the right thing

> and supporting the freedom movement. Those in power in the Akali Party were behaving just in the manner in which the Chief Khalsa Diwan walas behaved in 1914 in declaring patriots as being non-Sikhs. Efforts were being made to keep away the nationalist Sikhs from the SGPC (with official help) on lame excuses. The name of religion was being exploited, religion which was like nectar was now being exploited to lull people into slumber. That is why religion today was being described as an opium. The Sikhs need not be frightened away by the name of Pakistan, he added.[89]

So all Sikhs, in their own increasingly urgent self-interest, were urged to promote unity between the Congress and the League even if this, paradoxically, was seen to mean accepting some form or other of Pakistan. Of course, this line was bound to raise another bout of infighting among Sikh communists and the other main representatives of the Sikh community. Communists now realised that Akali propaganda critically affected the rural support which every communist was attempting to rally:

> The annual provincial kisan conference at Jai Bagga (Lahore) on the 29th and 30th of September, which was preceded by district kisan conferences in Gurgaon and Ferozepore was much below the standard of previous years. As usual, kisan jathas from several districts and states took part, but enthusiasm was lacking and the religious counter propaganda which the Akalis had carried out before hand had had some effect.[90]

All this simply underlined the fact that the left needed to get the Akalis on side and more generally the Sikhs as a whole. This was the context in which Gangadhar Adhikari developed his belated ideas of Sikh self-determination in an ill-defined territory in central Punjab, a fudged response to the impossible predicament in which the Sikhs had found themselves:

> The bulk of the Sikh population i.e. about 35 lakhs out of 51 lakhs is dispersed in the Central Punjab . . . According to our plan, this area of the Central Punjab will have a separate Constituent Assembly. If the Constituent Assemblies of Sind, Baluchistan, Pathanland and Western Punjab decide to form themselves into a separate Pakistan Federation, the Central Punjab would be free to decide whether it becomes an autonomous unit of the Pakistan Federation or of the Hindustan Union . . . The historical development in the Central Punjab has stamped the bulk of the people with an entirely different cultural impress and the unity of the Punjab will be possible only on the basis of recognising it and granting it full scope for self development.[91]

The precursors of independent India and Pakistan

In February and March 1946, elections were held in the Punjab. In these elections the left was completely crushed, indeed obliterated.[92] Although it had been legal

since 1942, fewer than two in a hundred voters in the Punjab backed a communist candidate in the elections,[93] a debacle not very different from what happened to communists in Bombay, where the party won just one vote in a hundred, and in Bengal, where fewer than 3 per cent of the voters backed the party. So it was not only in the Punjab that the communists did badly at the polls in these critically important elections on the eve of independence.

To place the communist failure at the polls into perspective, one crucial fact is the legalisation of the party, which had enabled it to take a new line during the war. As Puran Chand Joshi, the party secretary, put it, the communists were the younger brother of two more elder and better known siblings, the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League.

> P. C. Joshi claims in the Peoples War that a mass Communist party is being built 'as a crusade for national unity' to act 'as a bridge between the two premier political organisations of our people, the Congress and the League', and to seek, 'nothing for itself except to be acclaimed as a worthy younger brother discharging its patriotic duty in the hour of our trial.[94]

By changing their perception of their role, and by entering the legitimate constitutional arena of politics, communists saw their prime role and function as bringing together, in the role of intermediary or brother, the two leading parties of India, Congress and the League. In June 1945, Joshi went further in reformulating the party line by claiming the left had been wrong to agitate against the government. 'All our agitators must learn to speak from real life and not begin with "P' line" ie. seek to rouse patriotism by a general anti-Government harangue.'[95]

Punjabi communists tried to apply Joshi's new orientations to the situation in their province, and their metamorphosis into an electoral party ready to work within the constitutional frame was the result. But the problem was that the Punjab communists were not well placed in 1946 to conduct an effective electoral campaign or gain victory at the polls:

> They [Communists] admit however, privately that they are not really anxious for the elections to be held at the present in spite of their official propaganda . . . firstly, many of their most able workers are still in jail and are likely to stay there as long as the war lasts and their absence would hinder their election campaign. It is for this reason that they are agitating for the release of terrorist convicts, as they feel that their reappearance at this juncture as converts to communism would win them considerable sympathy and support.[96]

The priority of the communists in the elections was to 'support the just demands of both Congress and the Muslim League' and to 'oppose any attacks directed against itself'.[97] But just how profoundly weak the party was in the Punjab and how far behind its rivals it proved to be in the field of electoral politics can be gauged from the following report:

> The communists' election campaign which has now started, is being contested on different lines from that of other parties. Lacking the resources necessary for wide scale propaganda in the Press and at large conferences they are concentrating their strengths in the districts where their candidates are contesting the elections and are holding small meetings, distributing pamphlets, staging dramatic performances and sending small squads of workers throughout their constituencies.[98]

Given the particular circumstances of the Punjab and the grave consequences of any partition along a religious divide for all its communities, Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs alike, which only now began to come home to their leaders, the secular nationalism of the communists in the Punjab was bound to fail to win any real support from one side or the other in the elections of February and March 1946.

The League and the Akalis alike had, in the past, publicly and vociferously condemned the communists as atheists. They equated radicalism with immorality and godlessness. In criticising communism, they deployed the familiar discourse of the Punjab's colonial masters. Already by 1942, the League's stance on communists had become clear:

> The Muslim leaders . . . have little use for communism on political grounds and among the more orthodox, an account of prejudice against communist 'godlessness.' Jinnah in particular is said to have been very curt with the Punjab communist leaders who waited on him in Lahore at the end of November and bluntly told them that he regarded the communist Party as a subordinate branch of Congress; earlier at Jullunder he told a deputation of communist students that while he appreciated their recognition of the Muslim right to self-determination, he thought that their clear duty was to persuade Congress to accept this right rather than to mislead Muslims by urging them to agitate for the release of Congress leaders.[99]

For their part, the Sikhs were no more enamoured of the communist line than was the Muslim League. Moderate Akalis also now condemned their earlier flirtations with extremist, or 'red', Sikhs in Gurdwara elections. In the run-up to the 1946 elections, the Shiromani Akali Dal dramatically stepped up its anti-communist rhetoric. Whereas the Muslim League was still prepared to use Muslim communists to shore up its bases of support in urban working-class and rural constituencies where communists had some influence, Akalis now wanted to have nothing to do with them in town and country. Both these responses suggest that the communists were seen by Muslims and Sikhs to be far more of a threat and were thought to wield far more influence than the elections proved them to be or to have.

The fierce rivalry in rural Punjab between the Akalis and the Kirti–Kisan/communist movement to represent the predominantly Sikh Jats of the central Doaba was a major factor in explaining the communist debacle at the elections. The issue was no longer the war, since the Shiromani Akali Dal and the communists/

Kirti–Kisan had both supported the war effort. Akali misgivings about the communists had rather different roots. From as early as May 1942, some Akalis had become increasingly wary of the communists. 'The Akalis, who have no delusions regarding the long-term threat of Communism and dislike its anti-religious appeal, are uneasy and suspicious of this new challenge to their supremacy among the Sikhs and control of the Gurdwaras.'[100] However by 1944, the Akalis came out much more openly in their attacks upon communism.

> The decision of both parties in the Shiromani Akali Dal to stand firm against the spread of communism and to give limited support to Congress will make the Communist approach to the Sikh question more difficult. A noticeable feature of recent Akali rural conferences has been the increase in anti-communist propaganda denouncing them as atheists and accusing them of being paid agents of the Central Government.[101]

Here again the Akalis were against the communists in much the same way and for much the same reasons as the British. As independence for India ineluctably approached, the Sikhs, perhaps without keeping their eye firmly on the big issue, became ever more nervous about communism and devoted much of their efforts and such funds they possessed to fight it:

> Demands for extra funds from these Gurdwaras for parchar work were refused and the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandak Committee was accordingly forced to reject their budgets. A meeting is however being arranged to explain the necessity for these funds for *parchar* work in order to carry out anti-communist propaganda.[102]

In the process, the Sikhs, it can be argued, particularly with the advantage of hindsight, took their eye off the main game that was being played on the all-India stage and on the ineluctable and grave implications that its consequences – Partition – were to have for the Punjab and for their divided and scattered community.

This focus on the radical left in the wartime Punjab presents a picture that is in stark contrast to the conventional view, namely that in the 1946 elections the communists paid the price for 'betraying' Congress in 1942. Instead it suggests that an alternative political line had been developed by the communists which attempted to raise the level of all-India national awareness in the Punjab, and which tried to engage with Muslim politics at the same time. This strategy entailed risks that Congress leaders were not ready to take in a province where they were always on the margin and which they were ready at the end of the day, ruthlessly to sacrifice by dividing it in order to achieve a strong centre for independent India. This was also a period when the communists stuck to their internationalist line to support the war against fascism. This meant they lost the support of Congress Socialists and indeed of Congress itself, but did gain the opportunity to agitate publicly without fear of being flung into jail. Calculations of the costs and benefits of sticking to the line of People's War reveal that the left gained a measure of con-

solidation, imposed some ideological clarity to their propaganda and gained some confidence amongst the devoted few in working in a new political arena. By the end of the war, their membership had increased, they controlled the kisan sabhas in the Punjab, and the North Western Railway Union was led by a communist.

These little achievements had an ironic consequence. They resulted in the ejection of the communists from the electoral field. Because they were now considered a threat rather than a minor but useful ally, both the Congress and the Akalis would not give communist candidates tickets to contest the 1946 elections. In fact, one by one they were pushed out of the Congress; and the Akalis spent much of their resources to make propaganda against the communists. In the elections, Muslim communists had been instructed to stay in the Muslim League and try to influence their future and that of 'Pakistan' from within. Without the support of the Muslim League, the Congress Socialists, the Congress itself, as well as the Akalis and the Sikhs more generally, the communists in the Punjab were seen as a party committed to promoting unity between the two main national parties, which were clearly at loggerheads on the all-India stage. The result was that those in the Punjab who had the vote in 1946 (a mere 11 per cent of the population), emphatically decided not to waste their votes on communist candidates, whom they (perhaps rightly) concluded were the expenditure of the expendable.

Yet, as this chapter has shown, the work on the ground of the radical left had gained for them a foothold in the politics of independent India. It also shows the importance of the government, since the state gave communists the legal status which enabled them to enter electoral politics; and this in turn made it possible for the left to preach openly a radical line and influence the trajectory of Indian democracy, perhaps more in the longer term than in the events immediately preceding independence and partition.

Conclusion

From the standpoint of conventional political studies, communism in the Punjab failed. Far from achieving a socialist revolution, communists collapsed ignominiously at the polls in 1946, winning a tiny fraction of the votes. They never succeeded in building a peasant movement, and they failed to secure land reforms or to deliver their secular message in a province which, in the final analysis, was partitioned in 1947 on the basis of religion. Yet the communists were not irrelevant to the history of the Punjab or of India.

Much has been written about the party and its members. It has been amply demonstrated that they were seen as a threat by government and they were actively persecuted under legislation specifically designed to put them down. Weighty players in the political arenas of the Punjab usually saw them as competitors and sometimes as potential, albeit temporary, but certainly not inconsequential, allies. In particular, communists played a dominant role in influencing the official mind of government, its imperatives and methods of governance. Consequently, a study of the radical left in the Punjab throws light on the imperatives of government in perhaps the province of British India which the Raj considered to be the most crucial for its security.

In the final analysis, the most important protagonist that the left faced was the colonial state. Although subaltern historiography, which claims to let historical agents 'speak for themselves', has tended to ignore the role of the colonial state, its impact on the politics of the left in the Punjab was of the essence. The British strategy to counter the 'Bolshevik Menace' in India was in place before the very first groups on the left had established even a toehold in the Punjab; and the discourse of the left had to be formulated, and continually adapted, to respond to the policies and perceptions of the state. One inescapable conclusion is that neither of these two antagonistic forces, the Punjab administration and the radical left, succeeded in winning over the hearts and minds of the peoples of the Punjab. But both were integral parts of a tangled web which this book has tried to analyse. In this fascinating period in the history of the Punjab, the practices and policies of government, just as the politics and purposes of the left, were inextricably and unbreakably bound together.

The colonial state in its Indian setting found it useful to make much of the perceived ‘communist threat’. At the centre, the government saw a chance to drive a wedge between decent, law-abiding, God-fearing nationalists on the one hand and atheist, Soviet-loving communists on the other. Conversely, from the angle of vision of the Punjab administration, communism, with its project of taking politics to the people, represented the bigger danger, a threat capable of undermining the law and order in the province and the very basis of its rule. Nor were the communists welcomed by the dominant parties that won independence and subsequently ruled the new nation states of India and Pakistan. Even the big changes brought about by the Cold War failed to persuade the leadership of either India or Pakistan to welcome communists. Rather they have found different ways to isolate communists and to try and demonise them in a manner not altogether dissimilar from their imperial predecessors. Under colonial rule, the Punjab was a province in which communism was effectively contained, and so, to some extent, it has been after independence.

However, the colonial state was not alone in constructing and defining communism in the Punjab or in India. In the Punjab, the politics of the left drew upon local traditions and culture in order to appeal to its would-be followers. Despite their consistently radical message, politicians on the left attempted to fit into existing political spaces, arenas and apparatuses, both discursive and institutional, in order to acquire a measure of credibility as serious political players. A pedagogic relationship between the political architects of a new India and the left, which saw itself as the vanguard of an order truly representing the people, was the chosen route of the communists, with martyrdom, sacrifice and the threat of violence all part of their ideological and tactical armoury.

This study of the trajectory of the politics of the left has tried to assess success or failure defined in conventional ways. Rather, it has tried to show the constraints which Indian, and in particular provincial, circumstances placed upon the politics of the left in the Punjab. Whereas other studies have tended to focus on the growth of communism as a party and an organisation, this work has been concerned rather with the inwardness of communism as an idea and a movement, to see how it influenced the language, and expectations, of politicians in the Punjab. It has tried to seek out, define and describe the concepts and language which came to constitute the substance of communism in the province.

In summary, it appears that communism in the Punjab was a subtle and ever-changing mixture, as much pragmatic as dogmatic, of nationalism, secularism and a concern for social justice. It was grounded in the belief in the state’s prime function was to deliver these social goods to the people. For the radicals, their exemplar of success of such politics was the Soviet Union. They saw it as a just and egalitarian state. Therefore, the communist goal in its Indian setting was not some project to promote a ‘withering away of the state’, but rather an attempt to capture the institutional levers of state power and then use their control over the state (achieved by any means) to promote this purpose. This book has examined the attempts of radicals to influence legislation by bombing, by canvassing for votes at the polls and by playing a part in the ‘high politics’ of the Punjab, deploy-

ing for this enterprise all manner of tactics, including work they did in the schools, colleges and the rural localities of the province. 'Communism', in its Indian and Punjab setting, came to be a language of dissent in challenging the colonial state.

In assessing the impact of communism on the Punjab, the elections of 1946 (Table 5.1) are not an appropriate litmus test for historians or social scientists. Whether in the elections to Gurdwaras or to the state assemblies, many of the strategies, and rallying cries, of the communists have been taken up by other parties. Indeed much of the communist agenda, in the Punjab and beyond, came to be the common currency in Indian politics after independence of groups on the left.

To this day, Bhagat Singh is an icon of resistance and symbol of Punjabi pride, of masculine martyrdom and heroic struggle against oppression. His legendary status continues to inspire the politics of radicalism and dissent. Bhagat Singh represents a construct of nationalism that was 'modern', an alternative to Gandhi's non-violence. So he remains an heroic example not only to communists, but to Hindu and Sikh nationalists and even the Naxalites.

It is not altogether surprising then that, since independence, communists in the Punjab have won a measure of increasing support, particularly amongst landless peasantry.[1] In a relatively wealthy state, they also continue to have a role as a consistent advocate of secularism. Communists in the Punjab (and elsewhere in India) are no longer able to be summarily dismissed as seditious or alien. Their politics are accepted, however grudgingly by some, as legitimate. They are seen as a necessary voice in a democratic polity. Political commentators and ideologues have sometimes denounced the communists for not remaining true to the ideals of revolutionary socialism. But, as this study has shown, the impact of communism in the Punjab before independence cannot be measured by its ability or success in launching a revolution. Rather, its more modest but significant role has been to influence the making of a new nation state, by its help in shaping its democracy, speaking up for the poor, advocating economic progress and above all remaining a beacon of secularism in a society still dominated by religion. By these criteria, the communist failure at the polls is not the true measure of its influence over the politics of the Punjab.

Table 5.1 The Punjab Legislative Assembly after the 1946 election

Party	*Total seats*	*Gains and losses*
Muslim League	73	Plus 53
Congress	51	Plus 18
Akalis	22	
Unionists	20	Lost 57
Independent	9	

Source: Satya M. Rai, *Legislative Politics and Freedom Struggle on the Panjab, 1897–1947* (New Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research, 1984), p. 315.

Notes

Introduction

1 Yasapala (translated by Corinne Friend), *Yashpal Looks Back: Selections from an Autobiography* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1981).
2 E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1965), p. 10.
3 In his introduction to the first volume of *Subaltern Studies*, Ranajit Guha compared elite and subaltern politics. He states without recognising all the complexities: ‘Mobilisation in the domain of elite politics was achieved vertically whereas in that of subaltern politics this was achieved horizontally. The instrumentation of the former was characterized by a relatively greater reliance on the colonial adaptations of British parliamentary institutions and the residua of semi-feudal political institutions of the pre-colonial period; that of the latter relied rather more on the traditional organization of kinship and territoriality or on class associations depending on the level of the consciousness of the people involved. Elite mobilization tended to be more legalistic and constitutionalist in orientation, subaltern mobilization relatively more violent.’ R. Guha, ‘Historiography of Colonial India’, in *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, ed. Ranajit Guha (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 4.
4 See C. Kaye, *Communism in India with Unpublished Documents from National Archives of India (1919–1924)* (Calcutta: Editions Indian, 1971); D. Petrie, *Communism in India 1924–1927* (Calcutta: Editions Indian, 1972); S. Roy (ed.), *Communism in India: Unpublished Documents, 1925–1934* (Calcutta: Editions Indian, 1972); S. Roy (ed.), *Communism in India: Unpublished Documents, 1935–1945* (Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1976); H. Williamson, *India and Communism* (Calcutta: Editions Indian, 1976).
5 The Ghadr Movement is the first revolutionary movement seen around the Punjab, when almost 8000 Sikh migrants returned to the Punjab from Vancouver and California, with the aim of liberating their homeland. See Gurdev Singh Deol, *The Role of the Ghadar Party in the National Movement* (New Delhi: Sterling, 1969); Khushwant Singh and Satindra Singh, *Ghadar 1915: India’s First Armed Revolution* (New Delhi: R & K, 1966). For a more analytical perspective, see Harish K. Puri, *Ghadar Movement: Ideology, Organisation and Strategy* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1983).
6 Caution must be exercised about all figures of membership, which can indicate either strength or weakness depending on what organisation is being discussed. For example, a committed cadre of card-carrying members, working within a party divided into effective cells, was a very different political machine and had very different purposes from a party wanting to create a mass base. In any event, communist parties often had

influence well beyond the limits suggested by the size of their movement, whether among trade unions and organisations set up as fronts and among sympathisers and fellow-travellers who were not paid-up members.

7 Petrie, *Communism in India 1924–1927*, p. 67.

8 Langford James, 'Opening speech', in *Meerut Conspiracy Case, Prosecution Exhibits* (Meerut: Saraswati Press, 1929–33), vol. 1, p. C3, Archives of Contemporary India [henceforth ACI].

9 R. L. Yorke, *Judgement delivered by R L Yorke, Additional Sessions Judge Meerut on 16th January 1933 in the Meerut Conspiracy Case* (Simla: Government of India, 1933), vol. 2, p. 326. Nehru Memorial Museum and Library [henceforth NMML].

10 G. D. Overstreet and M. Windmiller, *Communism in India* (Los Angeles: California University Press, 1959).

11 Published during the peak of the Cold War, it set 'out to discover the truth where evidence is scanty and contemporary interpretation is carefully covered with purposeful obscurantism'. R. L. Park, 'Foreword', in Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism in India*, p. vi.

12 The conventional wisdom is that all communist parties outside Russia or later China were, in some sense, agents of an international strategy directed from Moscow or Beijing. Paul Brass, among others, has challenged this view in so far as it relates to communism in India. The relationship between centre and periphery was much more complex, with communists in India and elsewhere interacting with and affecting the political factions at the metropolitan command points, and, of course, vice versa. P. Brass, 'Political Parties of the Radical Left in South Asian Politics', in *Radical Politics in South Asia*, ed. P. Brass and M. Franda (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1973).

13 See S. Bannerjee, *India's Simmering Revolution* (London: Zed Books, 1982); M. F. Franda, *Radical Politics in West Bengal* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971); A. Javed, *Left Politics in Punjab: 1935–47* (Delhi: Durga Publications, 1988); B. Josh, *Communist Movement in Punjab (1926–1947)* (Delhi: Anupama, 1979); T. J. Nossiter, *Communism in Kerala: A Study in Political Adaptation* (London: C. Hurst, 1982); B. Pavier, *The Telengana Movement, 1944–1951* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1981); R. Ray, *The Naxalites and their Ideology* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988); G. Singh, *Communism in Punjab* (New Delhi: Ajanta, 1994).

14 Throughout the 1940s, 'Malabar was brought more firmly under the framework of law and order imposed from Madras. Malabar, and particularly its northern regions had been neglected outposts of the Madras Presidency till the events of 1940. In September 1940, the Intelligence Bureau had expressed its concern at being caught unawares, observing that it was "a most surprising development as coming from Malabar". By 1948, however, any militant activity was rendered increasingly difficult by the presence of an armed constabulary willing to defend order and property.' D. Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South Asia: Malabar, 1900–1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 188–9.

15 A. Javed, *Left Politics in Punjab: 1935–47*; Josh, *Communist Movement in Punjab (1926–1947)*; G. Singh, *Communism in Punjab*.

16 Bipan Chandra (ed.), *The Indian Left* (Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1983), p. 260.

17 Singh, *Communism in Punjab*, p. 6.

18 The *babas*, veterans of the Ghadr movement, after they came out of jail, remained in the Punjab, where they were treated as heroes.

19 The relationship between the communists and government during the war was, inevitably, ambiguous, as Government of India reports to London demonstrate. '[The] Communist Party remains a doubtful factor. Its official policy is still pro-war and such influence as it possess over labour has been exercised on the right side in several cases, but behaviour of many of its members proves what has always been clear, namely that it is composed far more of anti-British revolutionaries than of genuine believers in communist creed.' Linlithgow to Amery, April 1942, in Document 697

in Nicholas Mansergh (ed.), *Constitutional Relations between Britain and India: The Transfer of Power 1942–1947, Vol. 2: 'Quit India' 30 April–21 September 1942* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1971). [Henceforth TP, vol. 2, no. 697, etc.]

1 Political Punjab

1 Others have argued that the Punjab consists of five *doabas* or stretches of land that lie between six rivers, the tracts south west of the Indus river. The veteran Punjab historian, J. S. Grewal, has written 'it is not certain whether the river Indus, the river Satlej or the river Beas is meant to be excluded.' J. S. Grewal, *Historian's Punjab, Miscellaneous Articles* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak University, 1974), p. 2.
2 And certainly religion had a part to play in the defining movements of the twentieth century, whether the Khilafat campaigns, the Akali uprisings or the demand for partition.
3 M. L. Darling, *Wisdom and Waste in the Punjab Village* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), p. 55.
4 O. H. K. Spate, *India and Pakistan, A General and Regional Geography* (London: Methuen, 1954). p. 470.
5 Ibid., p. 468.
6 Ibid., p. 483.
7 Ibid., p. 482.
8 Darling, *The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 34.
9 Ibid.
10 However, according to Ibbetson, Sikh Rajputs were elite Jats who had rejected Guru Gobind Singh's call for egalitarian Sikhism and were in consequence punished for their intransigence during the years of Sikh rule in the Punjab. They also distinguished themselves from other Sikhs by following high-caste practices such as prohibiting widow remarriage and physical labour by women, while looking down on groups, such as the Jats, who allowed widows to remarry and women to work. D. Ibbetson, *Punjab Castes, The Chapter in the Census Report of 1881 on 'The Races, Castes and Tribes of the Panjab'* (reprinted Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 1994).
11 E. Stokes, *The Peasant and the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 233.
12 Ibbetson, *Punjab Castes*, p. 242.
13 R. Ballard, 'Panth Kismet Dharm te Qaum: continuity and change in four dimensions of Punjabi religion', in *Globalisation and the Region: Explorations in Punjabi Identity*, ed. Pritam Singh and S. S. Thandi (Coventry: Association for Punjab Studies, 1996).
14 *Baba* denotes a respected person, *Guru* a teacher, *Mahant* a Sikh chief priest, *Sant* a Hindu or Sikh ascetic, *Yogi* a Hindu ascetic especially nath Shaivite, *Sheikh*, a Muslim religious leader and *Pir*, a Sufi master. Ballard sees all Punjabis as 'participants in a common but multi-stranded panthic tradition which has its roots in popular forms of Sahajayana Buddhism which flourished in Punjab over a thousand years ago.' Ibid., p. 16.
15 Ibid., p. 20.
16 The heroes of the Hir Ranjha and Sohni Mahiwal folktales had rebelled against established customs which governed the key issues of love and *izzat*.
17 See the essay by G. Singh, 'History and Culture of Punjab through the Ages', in *History and Culture of Panjab*, ed. Mohinder Singh (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1988). He writes about Guru Nanak in the following terms: 'Guru Nanak's protest against tyranny was simultaneously a demand for liberty, for freedom from foreign yoke. His was a message of hope to the people to shake off their cowardice and

dependence and look to and have faith in God, "who" said the Guru, "can in an instant demolish the kingly edifices and raise the lowest of the low to the highest pedestal." He organised his people into Sangats or congregations and started langers or common messes where all sat and ate together without any distinction whatsoever of caste or creed, of high or low, or of rich or poor. This brought before them the vision of a classless democratic society where all could claim equal status.' Singh, 'History and Culture of Punjab through the Ages', p. 8.

18 H. H. Dodwell, ed., *The Indian Empire 1858–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), p. 89.

19 T. G. Kessinger, *Vilyatpur 1848–1968: Social and Economic in a North Indian Village* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974); B. S. Hira, *Social Change in the Upper Bari Doab, (1849–1947)* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1996).

20 C. A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 14. He shows that local disputes were settled locally, whether by *kazis*, who were government's agents in matters to do with the law, or by *panchayats*, the latter dealing with more parochial matters. There is some debate about the extent and boundaries of their respective roles, but it remains true that, at the base of Punjab society (as elsewhere in India), the British depended on local agents who were part of their system, both formal and informal, of enlisting collaborators and their subcontractors in maintaining law and order. Grewal, *Historian's Punjab, Miscellaneous Articles*, pp. 16–17.

21 Singh, *A History of the Sikhs, Volume 2: 1839–1988*, pp. 85–9.

22 John Beames quoted in P. Woodruff, *The Men who Ruled India, the Guardians* (London: Cape, 1954), p. 48.

23 Report of the administration of the Punjab for the years 1849–50 and 1849–51 (Calcutta: Calcutta Gazette Office, 1853), p .91, in Selections from the Records, 1849–1937, IOR/V/23/MF1, OIOC. 'The Board desires that substantial justice should be plainly dealt out to a simple people, unused to the intricacies of legal proceedings. Their aim is to avoid all technicality, circumlocution and obscurity to simplify and abridge every rule, procedure and process.' Ibid., p. 76.

24 Richard Temple drew up the Punjab Civil Code of 1854.

25 M. Gopal, ed., *The Punjab Laws Act (IV of 72)* (Lahore: Gulab Singh & Sons, 1897), preamble.

26 Ibid.

27 Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire*, p. 134.

28 These are John Lawrence's words. See R. Kumar, *Essays in the Social History of India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983). Interestingly, Lawrence's description shows just how much the British, in unfamiliar contexts, tried to make them less strange by using stereotypes with which they, and their domestic society, were familiar. So the peasantry of the Punjab became 'yeomen', and the balance of power in the countryside is seen as a mirror of the Home Counties, as David Cannadine or Cains and Hopkins have observed.

29 I. Ali, *The Punjab under Imperialism, 1885–1947* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 17.

30 In his words: 'The new world economy of the nineteenth century, into which South Asia was now inserted, decreed mass "peasantization" as the latter's fate.' D. Washbrook, 'South Asia, the World System and World Capitalism', in *South Asia and World Capitalism*, ed. Sugata Bose (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 41.

31 B. R. Tomlinson, *The Economy of Modern India 1860–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 85. Also see P. H. M. van den Dungen, *The Punjab Tradition – Influences and Authority in Nineteenth Century India* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1972).

32 In the demonography of the Punjab School, Hindu moneylenders were villains whose

usury unsettled and exploited the Muslims. S. S. Thorburn, *Musulmans and Money-Lenders in the Punjab* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1886).

33 Comparing attitudes in the Punjab to those in Britain, one historian has written, 'Just as British local government had always depended on the resident aristocracy and gentry, so their chosen partners in South Asia were the "natural leaders": large landowners, men of "property and rank", of "power and importance", who "exercised great influence" in rural society.' D. Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw their Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 43–4. A similar view was set out many years before in 1922: 'In general we may say that there is a well developed sense of clannishness, in that the rank and file look for leadership of certain individuals who are allowed by common consent to have some superiority, whether by family or of sanctity.' M. S. Leigh, *The Punjab and the War* (Lahore: Superintendent, Government Printing, 1922), p. 3.

34 Simon Commission, *Report of the Indian Statutory Commission: Vol. 1, Survey* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1930), p. 10.

35 Government of India to Secretary of State, 15 January 1861, in *Select Documents on the History of India and Pakistan. Volume IV, The Evolution of India and Pakistan 1858–1947*, ed. C. H. Philips (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 34.

36 L. Middledon and S. M. Jacob, *Report of the 1921 Census of the Punjab, Volume XV* (Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette Press, 1923), p. 40.

37 M. O'Dwyer, *India as I Knew it* (London: Constable, 1925), p. 39.

38 See N. G. Barrier, 'The Punjab Government and Communal Politics, 1870–1908', *Journal of Asian Studies* 27, no. 3 (1968); K. W. Jones, 'Communalism in the Punjab: The Arya Samaj Contribution', *Journal of Asian Studies* 28, no. 1 (1968); H. Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994).

39 D. Page, *Prelude to Partition* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 59.

40 Sir Langford James on the 'Bolshevik'. Langford James, 'Opening speech', in *Meerut Conspiracy Case, Prosecution Exhibits* (Meerut: Saraswati Press, 1929–33), ACH.

41 D. Petrie, *Communism in India 1924–1927* (Calcutta: S. Ghattack, 1972), p. 292.

42 *Indian Statutory Commission, Volume I: Survey* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1930), pp. 27–8. According to Gyanendra Pandey, '"Hindu" and "Muslim" political mobilization had been seen in the past as necessary, even inevitable, at least in the early stages of the building of an Indian nationalism. Such communitarian mobilization came to be regarded by more and more nationalist observers as a distorted and distorting tendency. "Hindu" and "Muslim" politics, with all their divergent aspects, became from the 1920s the chief flogging horse of Indian nationalism – divisive, primitive and, in a far more general nationalist judgement, the product of a colonial policy of Divide and Rule.' G. Pandey, *The Colonial Construction of Communalism in North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 235.

43 The complex and changing history of British and Russian rivalry in central Asia, or the Great Game as it came to be known, took a different turn in the interwar period when Britain tried to limit her military expenditure both at home and in India. See John Gallagher and Anil Seal, 'Britain and India between the Wars', *Modern Asian Studies* 15, no. 3 (1981), pp. 387–8.

44 D. Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History* (New Delhi: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 71.

45 K. Marx and F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto: A Modern Edition* (London: Verso, 1988).

46 V. I. Lenin, *State and Revolution* (London: Martin Lawrence, 1933).

47 D. Kumar and M. Desai (eds), *The Cambridge Economic History of India c. 1757–c. 1970*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 613.

48 S. Bhattacharya, 'Capital and Labour in Bombay City, 1928–29', *Economic and Political Weekly, Review of Political Economy* 16, no. 42/43 (1981).

49 Petrie, *Communism in India 1924–1927*, pp. 251–79.
50 Singh, *Communism in Punjab*, p. 48. The Akalis were the main political movement of Sikhs in the Punjab.
51 Fortnightly Report. First half of May 1928. Home Political File, 18/5/28, National Archives of India (henceforth NAI).
52 Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History*, p. 71.
53 S. Kaviraj, 'The Split in the Communist Movement of India' (Ph.D., Jawaharlal Nehru University), p. 104.
54 Kaye, *Communism in India with Unpublished Documents from National Archives of India (1919–1924)*, p. 199 (emphasis added).
55 Haig to Langford James, 29 April 1929, Home Political. File 10/IV/1929, ACI.
56 Crerar to Secretary of State Haig, Home Political File, 18/VII/28, NAI.
57 Petrie, *Communism in India 1924–1927*, p. 287.
58 Ibid., p. 288.
59 Director of Intelligence Report, 25 April 1929, L/PJ/12/389, Revolutionary Activities in India. Director of Intelligence Bureau Reports, April 1929–December 1930, Oriental and India Office Collection (henceforth OIOC).
60 Director of Intelligence Report, 23 June 1932, L/PJ/12/389, Revolutionary Activities in India, Director of Intelligence Bureau Reports, December 1931–December 1932, OIOC.
61 Director of Intelligence Report, 23 February 1932, L/PJ/12/389, Revolutionary Activities in India, Director of Intelligence Bureau Reports, December 1931–December 1932, OIOC.
62 Ibid.
63 For example: Director of Intelligence Bureau Report, 14 November 1929, 'The Psychology of the Youth Movement', and Director of Intelligence Bureau Report, 27 February 1930, 'Corruption of Indian Youth'. L/PJ/12/389, Revolutionary Activities in India, DIB Reports, April 1929–December 1930, OIOC.
64 Director of Intelligence Report, 11 December 1930, L/PJ/12/389, Revolutionary Activities in India, Director of Intelligence Bureau Reports, April 1929–December 1930, OIOC.
65 Ibid.
66 D. M. Laushey, *Bengal Terrorism and the Marxist Left: Aspects of Regional Nationalism in India, 1905–1942* (Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1975), p. 62.
67 Director of Intelligence Report, 11 December 1930, L/PJ/12/389, Revolutionary Activities in India, Director of Intelligence Bureau Reports, April 1929–December 1930, OIOC.
68 Home Political File 250/1/1930, NAI.
69 Report by N. C. Bannatyre, Brigadier, Commanding Lahore Brigade Area, dated 16 June 1930, Home Political File 250/I 1930, NAI.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
73 Emerson to Haig, 3 January 1930, Home Political File 98/1930, NAI.
74 Ibid.
75 Report by N.C. Bannatyre, Brigadier, Commanding Lahore Brigade Area, dated 16 June 1930, Home Political File 250/I/1930, NAI.
76 Hailey to Hurtzel, 15 March 1926. MSS Eur E220/12, OIOC.
77 Report on 'The Development of the Communist Situation in India 1928–29', Home Political File,18/VII K.W.XI, 1928, NAI.
78 R. B. Inden, *Imagining India* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 45.
79 Ibid.
80 J. E. Woolacott, *India on Trial* (London: Macmillan, 1929), p. 80.
81 Ibid., p. 160.

82 Ibid., p. 219.
83 Letter of Isemonger (Intelligence Bureau) to Haig, 20 September 1928, in S. Roy (ed.), *Communism in India 1925–35*, p. 40.
84 Woolacott, *India on Trial*, p. vii.
85 R. L. Yorke, *Judgement delivered by R L Yorke, Additional Sessions Judge Meerut on 16 January 1933 in the Meerut Conspiracy Case*, vol. 1 (Simla: Government of India, 1933), p. 283.
86 Kaye, *Communism in India with Unpublished Documents from National Archives of India (1919–1924)*, p. 145.
87 Yorke, *Judgement delivered by R. L. Yorke*, vol. 1, p. 287, NMML.
88 Report on Communism in India 1927–28, Home Political File, 18/VII/28, NAI.
89 Yorke, *Judgement delivered by R L Yorke*, vol. 2, p. 25. NMML.
90 Petrie, *Communism in India 1924–1927*, p. 283.
91 Kaye, *Communism in India with Unpublished Documents from National Archives of India (1919–1924)*, pp. 145–6.
92 Petrie, *Communism in India 1924–1927*, p. 66.
93 James, 'Opening speech', p. 41. ACI.
94 See Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana, 1976), pp. 57–60.
95 Home Political File, 10/IV/1929, NAI.
96 James, 'Opening speech', vol. 1, B2, ACI.
97 Ibid., vol. 1, p. C1, ACI.
98 Petrie, *Communism in India 1924–1927*, p. 64 (emphasis added).
99 Yorke, *Judgement delivered by R L Yorke*, vol. 1.
100 James, 'Opening speech', vol. 1, p. A4, ACI.
101 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 8, ACI.
102 Director of Intelligence Report, 11 December 1930, L/PJ/12/389, Revolutionary Activities in India, April 1929–December 1930, OIOC.
103 Ibid.
104 Director of Intelligence Report,14 November 1929, L/PJ/12/389, Revolutionary Activities in India, April 1929–December 1930, OIOC.
105 Ibid.
106 James, 'Opening speech', p. A2, ACI.
107 Yorke, *Judgement delivered by R. L. Yorke*, vol. 2, p. 326, NMML.
108 Ibid.

2 Martyrdom and the nation

1 Ghulam Hussain, an erstwhile university lecturer in Peshawar, was the man from the Punjab arrested in this case. His reputation among communists was low, since he turned informer after being arrested. He confessed to having been in the pay of the Russians and admitted, in an application for clemency to the Governor General in Council, 'My motive was an ugly one although at the time I felt no moral scruples to rob those who were themselves living on robbery.' Director of Intelligence Weekly Report, 20 February 1924, L/PJ/12/54 Indian Communist Party: Activities of agents of Manabendra Nath Roy in India: (Warrants issued under Reg. III of 1818 for the personal restraint of Shaukat Usmani, Ghulam Hussain and Muzaffar Ahmad) January 1923–January 1929, Oriental and India Office Collection, London (henceforth OIOC). Whatever his motives, Hussain's role was considered noteworthy by Ram Chandra, a leader of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha who, it is recorded, 'Came into contact with Professor Ghulam Hussain who infected him with Communist ideas.' Petrie, *Communism in India 1924–1927*, p. 334.
2 A graphic account of one such journey is given in S. Usmani, *Peshawar to Moscow, Leaves from an Indian Muhajireen's Diary* (Benares: Swaraj Publishing House,

1927). According to intelligence reports, one of the strategies by which the self-exiled communist M. N. Roy had accumulated roubles for the cause was by insisting that the Akali uprising of 1920–5 was a 'peasant rebellion' and needed financial assistance from the USSR, the centre of world revolution. In a 'secret' report of the proceedings of a private meeting on 11 November 1922 of the Colonial Commission of the Communist International, Moscow, Roy claimed, 'The Nationalist movement has met with ferocious repression in spite of which revolution in India is gaining ground. The Sikhs have started in Punjab'. Asking for money for the Indian Communist Party, he received the substantial sum of £120,000. Kaye, *Communism in India with Unpublished Documents from National Archives of India (1919–1924)*, pp. 39–40.

3 The Babbar Akali case ended on 12 January 1925. Ninety-four men were found guilty; five were sentenced to death, fifty-one transported and thirty-eight imprisoned. N. N. Mitra, *Indian Annual Register, 1926, Volume I, January–July* (Calcutta: Annual Register Office, 1926), p. 27.

4 The three main communist trends in India were represented by the Communist Party of India, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist–Leninist).

5 One article descries the corpse burning as 'condemnable'. It goes on, 'If this is true, gross insult has been offered to the tenets of the Hindu and Sikh religions . . . This is clearly an act committed against religion, morality and civilisation. It is a childish act of the Government which takes much pride in its advocacy of civilisation.' See *Vir Bharat*, 26 March 1931.

6 Home Political File 130/30. Note 'The Naujawan Bharat Sabha.' NAI.

7 The Nau Jawan Bharat Sabha, Director of Intelligence Bureau Report, 4 May 1928, IOR/L/PJ/12/375, OIOC.

8 See Shiri Ram Bakshi, *Bhagat Singh: Patriot and Martyr* (New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 1990); Bipan Chandra, 'The Ideological Development of the Revolutionary Terrorists in Northern India in the 1920s', in *Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India*, ed. Bipan Chandra (London: Sangam, 1996); Comrade Ram Chandra, *Naujawan Bharat Sabha and Hindustan Socialist Republican Army (H.S.R.A)* (New Delhi: Comrade Ram Chandra, 1986); Manmathan Gupta, *Bhagat Singh and his Times* (New Delhi: Lipi Prakashan, 1977); Max Harcourt, 'Revolutionary Networks in North Indian Politics, 1907–1935' (D.Phil., Sussex, 1973–4); Sohan Singh Josh, *My Meetings with Bhagat Singh and Other Early Revolutionaries* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1976); Kamlesh Mohan, *Militant Nationalism in the Punjab, 1919–1935* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1985); Yasapala, *Yashpal Looks Back*.

9 'Martial Law Ordinance, 1919'. Ordinance Number 1 of 1919 issued on 14 April 1919.

10 See Bakshi, *Bhagat Singh*; Chandra, 'The Ideological Development of the Revolutionary Terrorists in Northern India in the 1920s'; Chandra, *Naujawan Bharat Sabha and Hindustan Socialist Republican Army (H.S.R.A)*; Gupta, *Bhagat Singh and his Times*; Harcourt, 'Revolutionary Networks in North Indian Politics, 1907–1935'; Josh, *My Meetings with Bhagat Singh and Other Early Revolutionaries*; Mohan, *Militant Nationalism in the Punjab, 1919–1935*; Yasapala, *Yashpal Looks Back*.

11 Another relevant point is the particular branch of the Arya Samaj that members of the group encountered in their formative years. As Kenneth Jones has documented, the Samaj underwent radical changes during its history. He charts the divisions within the Samaj and claims that the more conservative and less communal leaders such as Lala Lajpat Rai and Lala Hans Raj won control over the educational institutions set up by the Samaj, whereas the more 'radical' leaders such as Pandit Lekh Ram were more interested in 'purifying' or reconverting Hindus from Islam or Christianity. See Jones, 'Communalism in the Punjab: The Arya Samaj Contribution'.

12 Indeed, the gurukul tradition of learning, which was taken up by the Arya Samaj, was one in which respect for a teacher was the path to wisdom for the select few worthy

of his teaching. See N. Dutta, *Forming an Identity: A Social History of the Jats* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 81.

13 See the chapter on Jats, Rajputs and allied castes in Ibbetson, *Punjab Castes*, pp. 38–97.

14 Herbert Risley, *The People of India* (Simla: Thacker, 1915), Appendix I, pp. 305–33.

15 For example, Gupta, *Bhagat Singh and his Times*, p. 82.

16 The reading of members of the group was eclectic. 'Thanks to Sachindranath Sanyal whose mental horizon was very wide, he insisted that we should read books which were against revolutionary ideas. So we read all types of books, especially books in which the tyranny of the British regime, the French regime and the Dutch regime were recounted. Then we read the history of revolutions and borrowed some books.' See interview transcript of Manmathan Gupta, 28 August 1974, S104, Cambridge South Asia Study Centre Archive.

17 The Naujawan Bharat Sabha, Director of Intelligence Bureau report, 24 June 1926, The Young India Association of Lahore, IOR/L/PJ/12/375, OIOC.

18 The Naujawan Bharat Sabha, Report on the political situation in Punjab for the fortnight ending 30 September 1926, IOR/L/PJ/12/375, OIOC.

19 See Harish Puri, *Ghadar Movement: Ideology, Organisation, Strategy* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1983).

20 1n 1920, a sizable number of Sikhs (175) formed the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee with the grand design of gaining control over the management and revenues of all Gurdwaras. The Akali Dal (Army of the Immortals) was the militant wing of this movement.

21 In the early 1920s, communist party activists had plans to create a mass forum in which the party could function legally and in the open. In the late 1920s, the worker and peasant parties fulfilled this role.

22 The Naujawan Bharat Sabha, Director of Intelligence Bureau report, 16 August 1928. IOR/L/PJ/12/375, OIOC.

23 Harcourt, 'Revolutionary Networks in North Indian Politics, 1907–1935', p. 309. Also see Home Political File 130/30, NAI.

24 Later he served a stint as President of the Hindu Mahasabha.

25 Youth Movement in India January 1925–April 1928, Director of Intelligence Bureau report, 12 January 1928, All India Youth Convention 17–19 December 1927, IOR/L/PJ/12/59, OIOC.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Youth movement in India: Intelligence Reports December 1928–October 1936, Director of Intelligence report, 31 October 1929, Lahore Students' Conference, IOR/L/PJ/12/60, OIOC.

30 Revolutionary Activity in India 1929–1933, *An Appeal to the Young* Pamphlet, 1932 in Director of Intelligence Bureau report, 7 November 1929, IOR/L/PJ/12/396, OIOC.

31 Home Political File 168/1930, NAI.

32 Punjabi loyalism was seen as the bedrock of the empire.

33 'The Indians surpassed all in their contribution to the war, nay, the Indians topped the list in making other nations slaves. People can well understand to what extent India was considered to be ignominious, contemptible and despicable by other nations owing to this. Why was this so? Because we Indians had done harm to them and snatched their liberty. We ourselves were slaves but we left nothing undone in making others slaves.' Copy of speech delivered by Abdul Majid, 24 February1928, translated by Morid Husain, Government of India, *Meerut Conspiracy Case, Prosecution Exhibits*, 1929–1933, pp. 1–3, NMML.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 'We think that we should dub those who performed sacrifices banishing selfishness, as martyrs and our own men. Although we do not follow the path chalked out by them, we should have regard for them; because the nation which has no regard for its martyrs cannot prosper. If Sikhs perform sacrifice they do so because they remember the martyrs. We too should always remember the common martyrs of India.' Copy of the speech delivered by Sohan Singh Josh, 16 December 1928, at a meeting held at Jallianwala Bagh in connection with the Kakori Day, under the auspices of the Naujawan Bharat Sabhas, translated by Sher Singh, Government of India, *Meerut Conspiracy Case, Prosecution Exhibits*, pp. 52–55, NMML.
37 Copy of the speech delivered by Sohan Singh Josh, 20 July 1928, at the Mahalapur Diwan, translated by Sher Singh, Government of India, ibid., pp. 28–36, NMML.
38 Josh has referred to the Akali rebellion as the turning point of his own political life. Sohan Singh Josh, *My Tryst with Secularism* (New Delhi: Patriot, 1991), p. 19.
39 Copy of speech delivered by Sohan Singh Josh, 18 August 1928 at Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar, translated by Morid Husain, *Meerut Conspiracy Case, Prosecution Exhibits*, pp. 37–8, NMML.
40 In one definition of renunciation, it is seen as a stage of life when a man becomes dead to the demands of society. L. Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1970), p. 184. However, Romila Thapar's definition fits the picture of Marx depicted above rather better. She has written that renouncers did not negate their society, but rather created parallel societies. 'Renunciation: The Making of a Counter-Culture?', reprinted in *Ancient Indian Social History* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 1978), pp. 56–94.
41 Home Political File 130/30, Note regarding the celebration of 'Bhagat Singh Day' at Amritsar, NAI.
42 A report on a 1929 conference stated, 'The proceedings of the conference concluded with a lantern display of murderers executed for their "patriotic services".' Home Political File 266/29, NAI.
43 History Sheet of Vir Inder, Home Political File 375/25, NAI.
44 *Simon Commission Report on India (Indian Statutory Commission). Vol. 2, Report of the Indian Statutory Commission: Recommendations* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1930), p. 52.
45 *The Tribune*, 25 March 1931.
46 Fortnightly Report February 1928, Home Political File 18/2/32, NAI.
47 Ibid.
48 Revolutionary Activity in India 1932, Director of Intelligence Report 21 April 1932, IOR/L/PJ/12/391, OIOC.
49 Kaushik Bhaumik, 'The Emergence of the Bombay Film Industry, 1913–1936' (D.Phil., Oxford, 2001), p. 118.
50 Ibid., pp. 137–40.
51 Ibid., p. 115.
52 Copy of speech delivered by Sohan Singh Josh, 5 August 1928, at Jallianwala Bagh under the auspices of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha, Amritsar, translated by Sher Singh, *Meerut Conspiracy Case, Prosecution Exhibits*, pp. 35–6, NMML.
53 Revolutionary Leaflets, Director of Intelligence Report 7-1-25, IOR/L/PJ/12/220, OIOC.
54 Copy of the speech delivered by Mir Abdul Majid on 29 September 1928 in the 3rd session of the Lyallpur Kirti Kisan Conference, translated by Ali Muhamed, *Meerut Conspiracy Case, Prosecution Exhibits*, pp. 49–52, NMML.
55 One study argues, 'Truthful action, for Gandhi was governed by the readiness to get hurt and yet not to hurt – action governed by the principle of ahimsa.' Erik H. Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth: On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 412. As Erikson has written, 'I wonder whether there has ever been another political leader who almost prided himself on being half man and half woman and who

so blatantly aspired to be more motherly than women born to the job, as Gandhi did.' Ibid., p. 402. Other authors have also commented on how Gandhi deployed his body in his political and social strategies; for example, Joseph S. Alter, *Gandhi's Body: Sex, Diet and the Politics of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2000). As one author has perceptively observed: 'Gandhi tried to give a new dignity to women by making a new equation between womanliness and political potency, denying in the process the Western association between maleness and control over public affairs and statecraft; rejecting martial traditions in India, which, like martial traditions in most other societies, debased womanhood; and abrogating the colonial identity which equated femininity with passivity, weakness, dependence, subjugation, and absence of masculinity.' Ashish Nandy, 'Woman versus Womanliness in India: An Essay in Cultural and Political Psychology', in *At the Edge of Psychology*, ed. Ashish Nandy (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 41. Much work has tackled the shifting role of masculinity in South Asia. See, for example, Radhika Chopra, Caroline Osella and Filippo Osella, (eds), *South Asian Masculinities: Context of Change, Sites of Continuity* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2004).

56 A study on the causes and consequences of Gandhi's approach states, 'Truthful action, for Gandhi was governed by the readiness to get hurt and yet not to hurt – action governed by the principle of ahimsa.' Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth*.

57 In a perceptive argument, Ashish Nandy has written about the internalisation of the west by colonial subjects. The story of groups such as the Naujawan Bharat Sabha fits well with his idea, as the Sabha members saw themselves as 'modern' men and fought the British using methods learnt by the colonial example. Ashish Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989).

58 Copy of *Kirti* (Gurumukhi), December 1926, *Meerut Conspiracy Case, Prosecution Exhibits*, NMML.

59 Qualities of a District Organiser (Naujawan Bharat Sabha), Home Political File 375/25, NAI.

60 Ibid.

61 Detention of Chanan Singh (a Communist) as a State Prisoner under Regulation III of 1818, Home Political File 44/79/35, ACI.

62 Copy of the speech delivered by Sohan Singh Josh on 5 August 1928 at a meeting held at Jallianwala Bagh under the auspices of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha, Amritsar, translated by Sher Singh, *Meerut Conspiracy Case, Prosecution Exhibits*, pp. 35–6, NMML.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.

66 Copy of speech delivered by Mir Abdul Majid 18 August 1928, translated by Morid Husain, *Meerut Conspiracy Case, Prosecution Exhibits*, pp. 39–42, NMML.

67 The Naujawan Bharat Sabha, Director of Intelligence Bureau report, 21 March 1929, Provincial conference at Rohtak, IOR/L/PJ/12/375, OIOC.

68 'The fact is that the relations between men and women in Russia are more independent than in the west. Sexual desires are comparatively less intense but the Russian women are far more modest than those of Germany, France and England.' Copy of *Kirti* (Urdu), translated by Morid Husain, Government of India, *Meerut Conspiracy Case, Prosecution Exhibits*, p. 68, NMML.

69 Copy of speech delivered by Mir Abdul Majid, 13 May 1928, translated by Morid Husain, Government of India, ibid., pp. 17–18, NMML.

70 The Naujawan Bharat Sabha, Director of Intelligence Bureau report, 21 March 1929, IOR/L/PJ/12/375, OIOC.

71 'Reduce the salaries of Englishmen drawing big salaries, reduce the budget for the police that beats us and thus make up the deficiency in land revenue.' Copy of speech

delivered by Sohan Singh Josh made on 26 May 1928 in Jullunder, translated by Sher Singh, Government of India, ibid., pp. 24–6, NMML.

72 Copy of speech delivered by Sohan Singh Josh on 29 September 1928, translated by Sher Singh, Government of India, *Meerut Conspiracy Case, Prosecution Exhibits*, pp. 44–9, NMML.

73 *Indian Statutory Commission, Vol. 2*, pp. 27–8.

74 Copy of speech delivered by Mir Abdul Majid on 15 May 1928, at the Jallianwala Bagh meeting held under the auspices of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha, translated by Morid Husain, Government of India, ibid., pp. 18–20, NMML.

75 Copy of *Kirti* (Urdu), August 1928, translated by Morid Husain, Government of India, ibid., p. 84, NMML.

76 Copy of speech delivered by Mir Abdul Majid on 15 May 1928, at the Jallianwala Bagh meeting held under the auspices of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha, translated by Morid Husain, Government of India, ibid., pp. 18–20, NMML.

77 Copy of *Kirti* (Urdu), August 1928, translated by Morid Husain, Government of India, *Meerut Conspiracy Case, Prosecution Exhibits*, p. 84, NMML.

78 Home Political File 375/25, NAI. Their respect for the American example was also illustrated by the proclamation that 'The object of the association shall be to establish a Federated Republic of the United States of India by an organised and armed revolution . . . the final form of the constitution of the Republic shall be framed and declared by the representatives of the people at the time when they will be in a position to enforce their decisions.'

79 Copy of speech delivered by Mir Abdul Majid 13 May1928, translated by Morid Husain, Government of India, *Meerut Conspiracy Case, Prosecution Exhibits*, pp. 17–18, NMML.

80 Copy of *Kirti* (Gurumukhi), June 1928, translated by Sher Singh, Government of India, ibid., p. 9, NMML.

81 Copy of speech delivered by Mir Abdul Majid on 15 May 1928 at the Jallianwala Bagh meeting held under the auspices of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha, translated by Morid Husain, Government of India, ibid., pp. 18–20, NMML.

82 Copy of speech delivered by Sohan Singh Josh on 24 February 1928 at the 2nd Naujawan Bharat Conference, Bradlaugh Hall, Lahore, translated by Morid Husain, ibid., pp. 3–9, NMML.

83 Lajpat Rai, *Lala Lajpat Rai: Writings and Speeches, 1888–1928*, vol. 2 (New Delhi: University Publishers, 1966); article written in 1915.

84 Ibid.

85 Key years in the national history denoting the Indian 'Mutiny', Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience respectively.

86 Revolutionary Activity in India, 1933, Director of Intelligence Bureau report 18 May 1933, IOR/L/PJ/12/392, OIOC.

87 Fortnightly Report May 1932, Home Political File 18/5/32, NAI.

88 Revolutionary Activity in India, 1929/1930, Director of Intelligence report 27 March 1930, IOR/L/PJ/12/389, OIOC. Another example was 'To organise those patriots who do not believe in the doctrine of replying to oppression with patience and of purchasing salt as a revenge for blood and do not get their names included in the list of bloody martyrs without doing something, the Atshi Chakkar has come into the field. The creed of the members of the Atshi Chakkar is to over power the powerful with power, the tyrant with tyranny and the oppressor with oppression.' In IOR/L/PJ/12/389, Revolutionary Activity in India, 1929/1930, Director of Intelligence Bureau report, 12 June 1930, OIOC.

This political strategy contradicts retrospective communist writing on this period, in which terrorism is labelled an 'infantile disorder' and is compared unfavourably with mass mobilisation by a revolutionary Vanguard Party. The group's terrorist activities have been viewed by communist narrators in different ways. Some simply

regard their approach as wholly mistaken, an anachronistic critique which does not take into account the relative approval with which terrorism was viewed by many nationalists. Others categorise the Naujawan Bharat Sabha as an adolescent stage in the politicising of communists in India; when it grew up, it would give up the wrong-headed ways of its early days, when it was green in judgement.

89 Youth Movement in India: Intelligence Reports December 1928–October 1936, Director of Intelligence Bureau report, 27 June 1929 (Students' meetings at Lahore And Amritsar), IOR/L/PJ/12/60, OIOC.

90 Terrorism in India July–December 1933, IOR/L/P&J/12/397, OIOC.

91 *Mazdoor Kisan* (Amritsar), 5 July 1931.

92 Ibid.

93 Bhagat Singh, *Why I am an Atheist* (Delhi: Shahid Bhagat Singh Research Committee, 1930). Reprint, n.d.

94 *Manifesto: The Philosophy of the Bomb*, Hindustan Socialist Republican Army, 1929.

95 'If you want to reform the world change this system which in itself is the most impure thing of all impure things. This very capitalism is responsible for evil deeds. All the evils are the outcome of this system. When the system will be changed no evil will exist.' Copy of speech made by Mir Abdul Majid on 29/9/29 in the 3rd session of the Lyallpur Kirti Kisan Conference, translated by Ali Muhamad, Government of India, *Meerut Conspiracy Case, Prosecution Exhibits*, pp. 49–52.

96 Bipan Chandra judges the group more harshly: 'In reality, the HSRA failed to do any political work among the common people; it had hardly any link or contact with them, not to speak of its organizing their class power and leading them in class struggles. It was virtually cut off from the classes which it had accepted in its programme as the social base of the revolutionary movement. This was one of the most important weaknesses of the HSRA.' Chandra, 'The Ideological Development of the Revolutionary Terrorists in Northern India in the 1920s', pp. 244–5.

97 In the competition to speak for labour in the 1920s, M. A. Ghani challenged the communists for control over certain unions. The following report sums up the situation: 'The Naujawan Bhaarat Sabha which ousted the Kirti Kisan from the control of the Workers' Board at Amritsar, suffered an ignominious defeat in its attempt to bring about a strike in some local cotton mills to a successful issue. The Sabha has now been further humiliated by the well-known labour leader, M. A. Ghani, who has taken upon himself to champion the labourer's cause and has weaned the workmen from the influence of the Naujawans.' Another example of efforts to win control over unions is another report: 'The Punjab Motor-drivers' Union has decided to send a deputation on tour to organise branches throughout the province. The formation of local unions has been encouraged by District officers in the interest of drivers and of motor transport generally, but the Punjab Motor-drivers' Union has a sprinkling of communists among its leaders and for that reason the extension of its activities must be regarded with suspicion. The tendency of communists to secure control and make use of existing unions is evidenced again in the case of the Amritsar Press Workers Union. M. A. Majid and other communists take a prominent part in the Union's affairs. It is also significant that the president of the newly formed Lyallpur branch of the Unemployed Workers' Union is the Secretary of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha, while the Secretary is an ex-President of the Sabha. K. N. Seghal, moreover was the principal speaker at a public meeting of this Union at Lahore held on the 29th of May.' Fortnightly Report May 1934, Home Political File 18/5/34, NAI. Ghani, an important union representative, submitted his views on Punjab labour in the Royal Commission of Labour: 'The Punjab is the nearest province to the Bolshevik Russia, and in order to save the labouring classes of this province from becoming militant, it is not only necessary to keep them satisfied but it is also necessary to watch them with a lynx eye.' *Report of the Royal Commission on Labour in India – Evidence Vol II, Part 1, Punjab*. 2 vols, vol. 2. Calcutta: Superintendent, Government Printing, 1931, p. 109.

98 Home Political File 31/III/1931, NAI.
99 Note on the Kirti Kisan Party and *Kirti*, Communist newspaper of Ghadr Party June 1929–December 1939, L/P&J/12/300, OIOC.
100 Copy of speech delivered by Sohan Singh Josh made on 29 September 1928, translated by Sher Singh, Government of India, *Meerut Conspiracy Case, Prosecution Exhibits*, pp. 44–9, NMML.
101 Report by N. C. Bannatyre, Brigadier, Commanding Lahore Brigade Area, dated 16th June, 1930, Home Political File 250/I 1930, NAI.
102 See the work of Clive Dewey, Imran Ali and Gerald Barrier, who all emphasise the role of the Punjab School of administration. I. Ali, *The Punjab under Imperialism*; N. G. Barrier, 'The Punjab Disturbances of 1907: The Response of the British Government in India to Agrarian Unrest', *Modern Asian Studies* 1, no. 4 (1967); N. G. Barrier, 'The Punjab Government and Communal Politics, 1870–1908', *Journal of Asian Studies* 27, no. 3 (1968); C. Dewey, *Anglo-Indian Attitudes: The Mind of the Indian Civil Service* (London: Hambledon Press, 1993).
103 Fenner Brockway, a Labour MP, had serious reservations about the Punjab government's measures to quell dissent. Brockway queried the repressive measures of government. The Government of India reacted angrily and argued that 'the policy of ignoring seditious speeches and articles in the hope that they would cease to attract attention' had backfired spectacularly. Herbert Emerson, later a Governor of the Punjab, claimed repression was essential to prevent sedition spiralling out of control: 'The result was that articles and speeches got steadily worse until they openly advocated violence and it was impossible to postpone action any longer.' The situation in the Punjab during Civil Disobedience led the Governor to urge, 'with the greatest force, the necessity of leaving unfettered the discretion which Local Governments enjoy under the law to deal with seditious movements.' Emerson's memorandum on Brockway's motion, dated 1 December 1929, Home Political File 299.1929, NAI.
104 Ibid.
105 Home Political File 138/1930, NAI.
106 Ibid.
107 League Against Imperialism: Reports on Activities July–December 1931, IOR/L/PJ/12/271, OIOC.
108 Home Political File 35/III/1931, NAI.
109 Ibid.
110 Ibid.
111 League Against Imperialism: Reports on Activities July–December 1931, IOR/L/PJ/12/271, OIOC.
112 Act No. XXIII of 1931, OIOC.
113 Measures to check the widespread tendency among youths to terrorist crime, Home Political File 4/35/31, NAI.
114 Ibid.
115 In a memorandum to the Home Department on the establishment of the Punjab University Students' Union, 30 September 1931, G. F. de Montmorency wrote: 'This has had a good and loyal influence, and has really begun to make headway against the seditious Punjab Students' Union, the NJBS and other undesirable associations which used to attract some students in Lahore.' Measures to check the widespread tendency among youths to terrorist crime, Home Political File 4/35/31, NAI.
116 Ibid.
117 Ibid.
118 Director of Intelligence Bureau, 15 August 1929, The Naujawan Bharat Sabha Conference, IOR/L/PJ/12/375, IOIC.
119 Fortnightly Report March 1932, Home Political File 18/3/32, NAI.
120 'Little interest was taken; Bhagat Singh Day evoked no real enthusiasm; meetings

were poorly attended.' Fortnightly Reports January–April 1933, Home Political Files 18/1–4/33, NAI.
121 Home Political File 7/20/1934, NAI.
122 Ibid.
123 Home Political File 44/64/1934, NAI.
124 Home Political File 44/79/1935, NAI.

3 Learning the new rules

1 See C. Bridge, *Holding India to the Empire* (New Delhi: Sterling, 1986); J. Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932–1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); J. Gallagher, 'Congress in Decline: Bengal 1930 to 1939', in *Locality, Province and Nation: Essays in Indian Politics*, ed. J. Gallagher, G. Johnson and A. Seal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); H. M. Nugent, 'The Communal Award: The Process of Decision Making', *South Asia* 2, no. 1–2 (1979).
2 Report of the committee appointed in connection with the limitation of constituencies and connected matters. Vol 1: Report, p. 55 in Government of India Act 1935, Commons Papers, British Parliamentary Papers 1802–1955, 10R.
3 At the first Round Table conference, Zafrullah Khan and Dr Shafaat Ahmed Khan, described as 'two disciples of the Punjabi Fazli Husain', represented landed Punjabi interests. Bridge, *Holding India to the Empire*, p. 52.
4 N. N. Mitra, *Indian Annual Register, 1932, Volume II, July–December* (Calcutta: Annual Register Office, 1933), p. 236.
5 Twenty-three of the thirty-five elected Hindu and Sikh members walked out. Ibid., p. 212.
6 'This Society was formed in 1920 by the late L. Lajpat Rai, who was a strong advocate of the formation of a permanent and financially sound institution which should furnish the country with trained missionaries for social and political work. The services of the Society were lent to the congress in 1921 and 1932, the Civil disobedience movement. As time went on, it became clear that the avowed objects of the Society were identical with those of the Congress. The Servants of the People's Society is perhaps the most dangerous organisation we have in the province at the present moment. It has funds; it employs the services of some of the cleverest paid propagandists in the province; and its members include several able and intelligent persons who have connections with all the important political organisations in the country and have a voice in the counsels of political leaders of all classes.' CID note by G. Ahmed (ADIG. CID) 20 December 1938. Enclosure, Craik to Linlithgow, 3 January 1939, in Lionel Carter, *Punjab Politics, 1936–1939: The Start of Provincial Autonomy* (Delhi: Manohar, 2004), Document 70, p. 285.
7 AICC – P-17 (i)/1937–38, All India Congress Committee Papers, NMML.
8 Sri Prakasa's report: Lahore Congress Affairs, P-17(i)/1937–38, All India Congress Committee Papers, NMML.
9 All India Congress Socialist Party Foreign Newsletter number 8, Minoo Masani, 9 September 1936, ICCP – G23/1936, All India Congress Committee Papers, NMML.
10 Most Congressmen wanted nothing to do with 'ministry formation', perhaps realising that they would not be in a position even to influence the matter in the Punjab.
11 P. L. Lakhanpal, *History of the Congress Socialist Party* (Lahore: National Publishers and Stationers, 1946), p. 35.
12 Copy of resolution no. 7 (b) condemning the CA passed in the Punjab National representatives Conference held at Amritsar 22 December 1935, in which a large number of Hindus and Sikhs assembled under the Presidentship of Pandit Krishna Kant Malaviya, MLA. Enclosed in letter to Rajendra Prashad and Satyapal, 25-X16 1935, All India Congress Committee Papers, NMML.

13 Meeting held on 31 December 1935, 25-X16 1935, All India Congress Committee Papers, NMML.
14 Letter from Virendra, editor of *Pratap* Lahore, 30 August 1935 to Rajendra Prashad, President AICC, G 24 1934. Letter from Nand Lal, 27 August 1935, AICC, G 24 1934. Dr Shaadi Ram Sharma, Member of City Congress Working Committee, Hoshiarpur, 25-X16 1935, All India Congress Committee Papers, NMML.
15 N. N. Mitra, *Indian Annual Register, 1934, Volume 1, January–June* (Calcutta: Annual Register Office, 1935), pp. 341–2; Lakhanpal, *History of the Congress Socialist Party*, p. 12.
16 Emerson to Linlithgow, 8 May 1937, Document 9, in Carter, *Punjab Politics, 1936–1939*, p. 90.
17 Home Political File 7/20/1934, Reports from Local Governments regarding action taken under the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1908, to declare local Communist Associations or Organisations to be Unlawful, NAI.
18 Action taken against Communists under the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1908, 1935–1937, IOR/L/PJ/12/474, OIOC.
19 'Draft Political Theses of the Communist Party of India' adopted by the Provincial Central Committee in December 1933. Published in "The Communist", Central Organ of the Communist Party of India. In *Documents of the Communist Party of India, Volume III, 1929–1938*, ed. Jyoti Basu (Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1997), pp. 143–63. Also see V. Verma, *From Marxism to Democratic Socialism: The Deeper Roots of Affinity* (Delhi: Books India International, 2005).
20 See discussion of Lenin in Sanjay Seth, *Marxist Theory and Nationalist Politics* (New Delhi: Sage, 1995), pp. 23–54.
21 Home Political File 24/1/1935, Communist Party of India Manifesto, NAI.
22 Singh, *Communism in Punjab*, p. 54.
23 Zetland to Linlithgow 8 February 1938, MSS EUR D609, OIOC.
24 Presidential address to the 3rd session of the all India Socialist Conference, Faizpur, 23–24 December 1937, by Jaiprakash Narayan, Home Political File 11/1/1937, Note on the Congress Agrarian Programme, 10 July 1937, compiled by Director of Intelligence Bureau, NAI.
25 For example, 'Communism in India was founded on dogma, and dogma has held it together. This dogma has had many facets – among them that the proletariat is infallible, that the international leadership is infallible, that the Party can do no wrong, that parliaments are the instruments of the exploiting classes, and that the inevitable sweep of history will bring the Party to power. Whenever reality contradicted dogma, the communists have turned their back on reality.' Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism in India*, p. 537.
26 Mubarak Saghar, Oral History, NMML.
27 Fifty-two members were elected to a Central Committee at the first Kisan Karza meeting on 3 March 1935. Home Political File 18/3/35, Fortnightly Report March 1935, NAI.
28 'The Anti-Imperialist People's Front in India' by Rajani Palme Dutt and Ben Bradley. Also known as 'Dutt–Bradley Thesis'. Published in *IMPRECOR*, 29 February 1936. In *Documents of the Communist Movement in India*, vol. 3, pp. 219–34.
29 Home Political Report 24/1/1935, Communist Party of India Manifesto, NAI.
30 Ibid.
31 Home Political File, 18/10/35, Fortnightly Report October 1935, NAI.
32 Indeed the leader of the 'No Ministry' lobby was Sardar Singh Caveesher, a Congress stalwart of the Punjab. He moved an amendment demanding a decision on the Ministry issue at the AICC before the election but was defeated when this was put to the vote. AICSP Foreign Newsletter no. 8, Masani, 9 September 1936, G23/1936, All India Congress Committee Papers, NMML.

33 N. N. Mitra, *Indian Annual Register, 1934, Volume II, July–December* (Calcutta: Annual Register Office, 1935), p. 209.
34 Duni Chand to Nehru, 31 March 1937, P-17(II)/1937, All India Congress Papers, NMML.
35 In late 1937 a Jullunder stalwart described him as 'a man who has spent the best portion of his life in jail and whom I have found to be very actively engaged in Congress work with his group. This group is likely to emerge as a Workers' Party in powering the province in the real Congress elections, leaving both Dr Gopichand and Dr Satyapal high and dry. It will be for the good of this country I am sure.' Letter from G. C. Sondhi to Jawaharlal Nehru, 5 October 1937, P-17, Part 1, All India Congress Committee Papers, NMML.
36 Home Political File 18/9/41, Fortnightly Report September 1941, NAI.
37 Home Political File 111/1937, NAI
38 Emerson to Linlithgow, 26 March 1937, Document 7, in L. Carter, *Punjab Politics, 1936–1939*, p. 81.
39 The party was founded in 1929 by ex-khilafatists and ex-Congress Muslims around a programme that combined egalitarianism and a strong religious commitment to shar'iat.
40 This was articulated clearly in a newspaper article written by K. B. Mian Ahmad Yar Khan Daultana, MLC, Chief Secretary of the Unionist Party, in February 1937. 'The founder of the Unionist Party, the late Mian Sir Fazl-i-Husain, was a far sighted politician. He always laid the greatest possible emphasis on his perfectly sound theory that the intellectual classes and big landlords could retain the political picture only by identifying themselves sincerely with the interests of the poor. If they want to retain their political leadership they must pay a price for it, the price being that they must not look to the economic interests of their own class but try to promote a socialist programme.' *Civil and Military Gazette*, 7 February1937, Lahore, NMML.
41 'On the morning of 3rd September, I reached Lahore for a visit of 8–9 days duration to the Punjab. The purpose of my visit was to help in the organisation of the recently affiliated Punjab Congress Socialist party and in particular to try and induce another radical group which was not yet in the Party to join the organisation. On the morning of the 4th of September before I even addressed a single public meeting I was served with an order of externment by the Punjab Government. That same evening a public meeting was held in Lahore at which I spoke and at which Dr Satyapal . . . proposed and Sardar Sardul Singh Caveesher . . . seconded a resolution condemning the Punjab Government's ban. At noon on 5th September, I was arrested by the Superintendent of Police at Lajpatrai Bhavan and then released on reaching Delhi.' G23/1936, All India Congress Committee Papers, NMML.
42 One Intelligence Officer reported on 5 January 1936 that 'In the Punjab, Dr Gopichand Bhargava is carrying out a village redistribution programme in the districts of Jullunder, Hoshiarpur and Kangra.' Home Political File 4/20/1936, NAI.
43 It was alleged that he introduced the concept to Punjabis in 1927 upon his return from revolutionary Russia. On describing the impact of a speech by Nehru at the annual session of the Punjab Provincial Political Conference in April, 1928, Josh states, 'It was for the first time that the word socialism became familiar in the political atmosphere of Punjab.' Josh, *Communist Movement in Punjab (1926–1947)*, p. 80.
44 See Mushirual Hasan, 'The Muslim Mass Contact Campaign: An Attempt at Political Mobilisation', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 7, no. 1 June (1984), pp. 58–76.
45 Home Political File 4/14/36, NAI.
46 Home Political File 18/6/36, Fortnightly Report June 1936, NAI.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.

50 Home Political File 4/14/36, NAI.
51 P-17 for 1934, 1935, 1936, All India Congress Committee Papers, NMML.
52 Home Political File 4/9/37, Extract from fortnightly report, January 1937, NAI.
53 Nehru wrote to Malaviya on 26 January 1937: 'But merits apart what I am faced with is the clear position that Shanno Devi and Kesho Ram are opposing Congress nominees and you are openly supporting them. What am I to do with this? I am getting a large number of letters of protest and of enquiry as to what steps we should be take on the matter. I do not know what to say in reply. Your general and particular support of many Congress candidates has been of great value to us . . . hence my distress.' E17–24/1937, All India Congress Committee Papers, NMML.
54 'Mr M.A. Jinnah arrived in Lahore on the 10th of October and on the following day addressed a public meeting attended by about 6000 Mohammedans. The two main points from his speech were that he wanted "to break the Ministries which had already been formed here" and to hammer out a strong block to march together with the Hindus'. Home Political File 18/10/36, Fortnightly Report October 1936, NAI.
55 Home Political File 18/6/36, Fortnightly Report June 1936, NAI.
56 Ibid.
57 'Chhottu Ram's group of rural Hindus will number about 9 members, and will of course be staunchly Unionist. The failure of Congress in rural constituencies in the south-east, which border on the United Provinces, is very satisfactory, and shows that, for the present at any rate, the Jats, Rajputs and Gujars of that part of the Province prefer their own tribal leaders to Congressmen. Emerson to Linlithgow, 22 February 1937, Document 6 in Carter, *Punjab Politics, 1936–1939*, p. 77.
58 Home Political File 111/1937, NAI.
59 Home Political File 4/9/37, Report on first half of February 1937.
60 Home Political File 111/1937, NAI.
61 Nehru to Bhargava, 5 March, 1936: 'I have taken the trouble to go into this matter and I must confess that the more I look into it the more it disgusts me. Punjab politics seem to have got into such a hopeless state of mess that nothing but a major operation is likely to put them on right lines. The Congress in Punjab simply means a handful of persons in the few cities, and that handful quarrelling continuously. 'The last elections showed us where the Congress was strong and where it was weak. Nowhere in India have we got such a thing as a typical pro-Government party like the Unionist Party gaining so much support in the Province. I must confess that I have not quite got over the fact that the key seats in the Punjab were left uncontested by us. It is my belief that we could have captured almost every rural seat in the Punjab, Hindu, Muslim or Sikh if we had approached the peasantry on the right lines.

'The Congress does not even go near the peasantry in the Punjab and in cities it is busy with personal squabbles.' E-17(i) 1936–37, All India Congress Committee Papers, NMML.
62 Home Political File 111/1937, NAI.
63 Home Political File 4/9/37, Extract of fortnightly report for the first half of February, 1937, NAI.
64 Home Political File 18/4/37, Fortnightly Report April 1937, NAI.
65 Writing of Iftikarudin: 'There is one Muslim Communist, a curious case, as he belongs to a family with very loyal traditions and was educated at the Chief's college and at Oxford. His election, however, was entirely due to his tribal influence, had no reference to communistic tendencies, and the Unionist Party ought later to be able to get hold of him.' Emerson to Linlithgow, 22 February 1937, Document 6 in Carter, *Punjab Politics, 1936–1939*, p. 77.
66 Josh, *My Tryst with Secularism*, p. 213.
67 Ben Bradley, 'The Indian Elections', in *Documents of the Communist Movement in India*, ed. J. Basu, vol. 3 (Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1997–9), p. 351.

68 Emerson to Linlithgow, 24 April 1937, Document 8 in Carter, *Punjab Politics, 1936–1939*, p. 85.
69 N. N. Mitra, *Indian Annual Register, 1937, Volume1, January–June* (Calcutta: Annual Register Office, 1938), p. 155.
70 Ibid., p. 156.
71 *Civil and Military Gazette*, 3 April 1937, NMML.
72 The Speaker finally made a ruling on 5 July 1938 that members could speak in the language of the province, prompting both Bhargava and, significantly, Sikander Hyat Khan to speak in Hindustani. N. N. Mitra, *Indian Annual Register, 1938, Volume 2, July–December* (Calcutta: Annual Register Office, 1939), p. 191.
73 Zetland to Linlithgow, 27 June 1939, MSS EUR D609/11, OIOC.
74 Linlithgow to Zetland, 7 July 1939, MSS EUR D609/18, OIOC.
75 *Punjab Legislative Assembly Debates*, (Lahore: 1937), 12 April 1937, p. 199.
76 Ibid.
77 See glossary.
78 *Punjab Legislative Assembly Debates*, 12 April 1937, p. 200.
79 Ibid.
80 *National Front*, 30 October 1938, Communist Party of India Library, Ajay Bhavan, New Delhi.
81 In the tradition of the long-standing alliance between the urban Hindu Punjabis and the Congress-led groups who had consistently campaigned against the Land Alienation Bills since 1901, Maulana Azad (the Congress Working Committee member charged with overseeing the actions of the Punjab in the Congress High Command) now ordered the Punjabi Congress MLAs to vote for the Agrarian Bills. In response, 'Dr Gopichand appears to have informed Azad that the orders will be obeyed but that he must find someone else to lead the Congress party in the Assembly, and it is said that another 14 other Congress men intend to follow Gopichand's example.' Zetland to Brabourne (Acting Viceroy), 8 August 1938, MSS EUR 609/10, OIOC.
82 In its crudest form, 'In my time I have done what I could to serve the interests of the peoples of India, and particularly of the dumb masses who, in the tumult and the shouting of politics, are least likely to get a hearing.' O'Dwyer, *India as I Knew it*, p. x. Malcolm Darling's writings are testimony to this important aspect of the 'Punjab tradition', investigated, *inter alia*, by Clive Dewey in his *Anglo-Indian Attitudes*.
83 Craik to Linlithgow 10 May 1938, Document 46 in Carter, *Punjab Politics, 1936–1939*, p. 213.
84 *Punjab Legislative Assembly Debates*, 6 July 1937, p. 1067.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
87 N. N. Mitra, *Indian Annual Register, 1939, Volume 1, January–June* (Calcutta: Annual Register Office, 1940), p. 272.
88 Ibid., p. 264.
89 *National Front*, 13 February 1938, Communist Party of India Library, Ajay Bhavan, New Delhi.
90 Home Political File 18/3/39, Fortnightly Report for the second half of March, 1939.
91 'On the 23rd of March there were attempts on the part of peasants of the Lahore district to demonstrate outside the Legislative Assembly chamber against the reassessment of land revenue recently announced in the district. The demonstrators were not allowed to approach the Assembly Chamber, but a good many arrests had to be made, similar demonstrations have been made on each successive day on which the assembly sat and have imposed a considerable strain on the Police. I do not think this is a genuine agitation, but believe that it has been deliberately manufactured by the Congress and Communist parties in order to discredit the Ministry. It is expected to fizzle out in a few days from now.' Craik to Linlithgow, 2 April 1939, Document 85 in Carter, *Punjab Politics, 1936–1939*, p. 326.

92 Craik to Linlithgow, 17 May 1939, Document 90, ibid., p. 344.

93 'I have some hope that the Lahore Kisan morcha will now shortly collapse, as a considerable number of the more prominent organisers have been arrested and are being prosecuted, and the local authorities have been instructed to deal with jathas trying to enlist recruits in the districts adjoining Lahore as unlawful assemblies. During the second half of June only 124 arrests were made in Lahore on four days. On most days no people offered themselves for arrest.' Craik to Linlithgow, 7 July 1939, ibid., Document 96, p. 360.

94 Home Political File 18/11/36, Fortnightly Report November 1936, NAI.

95 Home Political File 18/4/37, Fortnightly Report April 1937, NAI.

96 Josh, *My Tryst with Secularism*, p. 214.

97 Further evidence of Josh's own political acumen is perhaps indicated by the fact that he was elected General Secretary of the Punjab Provincial Congress Committee on 16 April 1939. Home Political File 18/4/39, Fortnightly Report April 1939, NAI.

98 Home Political File 13/2/1938, C.P.I., 'The Communists and the Congress: Being the thesis on the role of the Indian Communists in the struggle for Complete Independence of India, (with a note by Krishna Swamy)' (Agra, 1938), ACI.

99 Ibid.

100 Emerson to Linlithgow, 18 December 1937, Document 25 in Carter, *Punjab Politics, 1936–1939*, p. 153.

101 Home Political File 18/5/39, Fortnightly Report May 1939, NAI.

102 Home Political File 18/2/40, Fortnightly Report February 1940, NAI.

103 'It was decided to build up an Akali Volunteer organisation, to be known as the "Akali fauj" or "Akali Sena" at a joint meeting of the Shirimani Akali Dal and city Akali Jatha of Amritsar on the 4 of April 1939 . . . The formation of these Volunteer organisations is the outcome of the Akali jealousy between the Akali Party and the group of rural agitators controlled by the Ghadr Conspiracy case convicts (the Babas) . . . The present Kisan Morcha in Lahore is further detracting from Akali influence.' CID Lahore report by W. D. Robinson, 12 April 1939. Enclosure, Craik to Linlithgow, 17 April 1939, Document 87 in Carter, *Punjab Politics, 1936–1939*, pp. 331–2. 'So far as the Hindu groups are concerned the chief appeal to prospective members appears to be the Communal and Religious appeal. I notice for example that the Mahabir Dal, whose preferred objects are purely religious service claims 10,000 adherents in the Punjab. On the other hand, it has to be observer that in the case of other Hindu Volunteer organisations military training seems to be adopted.' Zetland to Linlithgow, 24 January 1939, MSS EUR D609/11, OIOC.

104 *National Front,* 4 December 1938, Communist Party of India Library, Ajay Bhavan, New Delhi.

105 Home Political File 58/38, Director of Intelligence Report, Notes re Anti-recruitment and Anti-war Propaganda, NAI.

106 Home Political File 61/30, Director of Intelligence Report, Notes re Anti-recruitment and Anti-war Propaganda, NAI.

107 Ibid.

108 Home Political File 58/38, Director of Intelligence Report, Notes re Anti-recruitment and Anti-war Propaganda, NAI.

109 However, some idea of the success of Unionist recruitment methods can be gauged from the fact that Punjab recruited 800,000 combatants throughout the war and raised Rs 250 million through war loans and donations. T. Y. Tan and G. Kudaisya, *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 217.

110 Home Political File 58/38, Director of Intelligence Report, Notes re Anti-recruitment and Anti-war Propaganda, NAI.

111 Ibid.

112 Ibid.

113 Home Political File 18/5/39, Fortnightly Report May 1939, NAI.

114 Ibid.
115 Home Political File 58/38, Director of Intelligence Report, Notes re Anti-recruitment and Anti-war Propaganda, NAI.
116 Craik to Linlithgow, 29 October 1939, Document 114 in Carter, *Punjab Politics, 1936–1939*, p. 395.
117 Home Political File 18/10/36, Fortnightly Report October 1936, NAI.
118 'November 1937 – UP. On November 17th at the District Kisan Conference held in connection with the Bhai Ghat Mela, Shahjahanpur's communists and ex-terrorist speakers were prominent. Parmanand (ex-convict in the first Lahore Conspiracy Case) in moving a resolution against participation in the next imperialist war appealed to his audience numbering between 4000 and 5000 persons to organise themselves and to bring about a revolution.' Home Political File 58/38, Director of Intelligence Report, Notes re Anti-recruitment and Anti-war Propaganda, NAI.
119 Ibid.
120 Home Political File 18/3/37, Fortnightly Report March 1937, NAI.
121 Satyapal protested against the Congress High Command's complicity in allowing Congress members to attend in a letter to Nehru dated 17 November 1937. P.17(II)/1937, All India Congress Committee Papers, NMML.
122 N. N. Mitra, *Indian Annual Register, 1939, Volume I, January–June* (Calcutta: Annual Register Office, 1940), pp. 264–8.
123 Indian Civil Liberties Union Press Communique. 41/1936, All India Congress Committee Papers, NMML.
124 Ibid.
125 N. N. Mitra, *Indian Annual Register, 1939, Volume II, July–December* (Calcutta: Annual Register Office, 1940), p. 184.
126 Craik to Linlithgow, 1 December 1939, Document 119 in Carter, *Punjab Politics, 1936–1939*, p. 404.
127 Mitra, *Indian Annual Register, 1939, Volume I, January–June*, p. 184.
128 'There has been a considerable spate of anti-recruitment speeches, particularly during the course of the Amritsar bye-election campaign, polling for which took place in the last week of September. The result of this election was the Muslim League unionist candidate was elected by a majority of nearly 900 votes over the Ahrar candidate, the congress candidate, Dr Kitchlew, being a bad third. As soon as polling was over, the Ahrar candidate, Chaudhri Afzul Haq, was arrested under the Defence of India Rules for a bad anti-recruitment speech, and a large number his prominent supporters were similarly arrested. One of them, Shaikh Hissam-ud-Din, the so-called Ahrar dictator, was sentenced to two years' imprisonment, which has had a good deterrent effect. Numerous arrests had also been made on the same ground in the Multan Division.' Craik to Linlithgow, 13 0ctober 1939, Document 111 in Carter, *Punjab Politics, 1936–1939*, p. 389.
129 N. N. Mitra, *Indian Annual Register, 1940, Volume, II January–June* (Calcutta: Annual Register Office, 1941), pp. 163–5.
130 Craik to Linlithgow, 11 October 1938, Document 61 in Carter, *Punjab Politics, 1936–1939*, p. 255.
131 See Vilfredo Pareto, *The Mind and Society: A Treatise on General Sociology* (New York: Dover Publications, 1935).

4 The contradictions of communism during the Second World War

1 Copy of Circular Number 24/25, 1 June 1945, issued by P. C. Joshi in Bombay to subordinate Communist organizations. Communist Activities in India 1938–45, Communist Survey Number 5, IOR/L/PJ/12/431, OIOC.
2 Jai Prakash Narain in a speech on 9 March 1947 at Bangalore. Communist Activity in

India, 1946–48, Communist Survey 15 December–15 May 1947, IOR/L/PJ/12/432, OIOC.

3 In 1941 when Churchill signed the Atlantic Charter with Roosevelt, the Prime Minister made it clear that Article 3, which set out ‘The right of all people to choose the form of government under which they will live’, did not apply to ‘the development of constitutional government in India, Burma or other parts of the Empire.’ R. J. Moore, *Churchill, Cripps, and India, 1939–1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 42. However, when Atlee and Labour took office, it soon became apparent that ‘Labour favoured an early withdrawal not only because the party was pledged to it, but because it would best serve Britain’s own interests.’ R. J. Moore, *Endgames of Empire: Studies of Britain’s Indian Problem* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 5.

4 This is the view of many chroniclers, most vividly in the words of Mosley: ‘600,000 Indians died for Independence and 14,000,000 lost their homes. Men became brutes. The air over the Indo-Pakistan frontiers was soured for at least a generation. Unnecessarily. It need not have happened. It would not have happened had independence not been rushed through at such a desperate rate. Never has such a grave moment in the lives of 350,000,000 people been decided with such efficiency, such skill and charm, and without any real consideration of its profound consequences.’ L. Mosley, *The Last Days of the British Raj* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1961), pp. 245–6. This view, which is a parody of the many complex factors at play in the end-game, is challenged in the chapter, ‘Mountbatten, India and the Commonwealth’ in Moore, *Endgames of Empire*, pp. 134–73. Also see G. Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and the History of India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

5 Even Sumit Sarkar, a historian sympathetic to the role of the Communist Party of India, concedes that ‘What we have to understand are the deeper factors underlying the new popular mood of August 1942, which Gandhi certainly sensed and reflected incomparably better than the Communists with their theoretically not unjustifiable people’s war line.’ Sarkar, *Modern India* (Madras: Macmillan, 1983), p. 391.

6 Neither the official website of the Communist Party of India nor that of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) mentions the People’s War line. The collection of documents that spans the years of the formation of the Communist Party of India until the Party’s split in 1964 includes this criticism of their policy. ‘While rightly supporting the anti-imperialist war it [Communist Party] failed to integrate the contradictions in the international sphere with the contradictions in the national sphere which weakened its struggle for national unity to win national government. While lending support to the struggle against fascism in the international sphere, it was necessary for the Party to bring pressure on British imperialism to establish national government representing the Indian people. Only at a stage when fascist hordes had come to the doorstep of our country we could have joined hands with all the forces to fight back. This policy naturally led to out isolation from the national movement to an extent. It adopted a line of avoiding mass struggles on the plea that they would damage the war efforts or help pro-fascist elements to sabotage it. The Quit India movement was opposed on the same basis. The Forward Bloc and socialists who attacked Communists as British agents were denounced in retaliation and were called Fifth Columnists and fascist agents.’ Harikishen Singh Surjeet’s Foreword to *Documents of the Communist Movement in India*, ed. J. Basu, vol. 4 (Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1997), p. lii–liii.

7 The war years have not been studied sufficiently in terms of the impact of the war on social, economic and political movement other than the overwhelming but unspecific perception of the war as a catalyst of independence and partition. See: Indivar Kamtekar, ‘A Different War Dance: State and Class in India 1939–1945’, *Past and Present* 176, no. 1 (2002).

8 Most accounts see the Bengal Famine of 1943 as a commentary on imperial priorities during the war, and an explanation of why the nationalists wanted independence and indeed soon, once the war had ended.

9 See Chapter 1 above.

10 'It is difficult to say how any concession to Congress would assist the war effort in respect to the military personnel of the Punjab. On the other hand it might result in the ruin of the Indian Army as at present constituted.' Note by Major General Lockfort, L/PO/6/1066ff 360–1 India Office, 25 February 1942, TP, vol. 1, no. 180.

11 See Chapter 3 above.

12 Home Political File 7/1/40, NAI.

13 Ibid.

14 A list of members of the Communist Party of provincial and local importance who were already under trial or convicted as well as those whose movements had been restricted showed the Punjab at the forefront with 134. Bombay and Bengal followed with ninety-one and eighty-two respectively. (National leaders were omitted from this count.) Home Political File – KW to 7/1/40, NAI. The Government of India issued orders for the detention of nineteen principal communist leaders under the Defence of India Rules on 23 March 1940, IOR/L/PJ/12/636, OIOC.

15 K. Damordaran, 'Memoirs of Indian Communism', *New Left Review* 1, no. 93 (1975).

16 'The biggest gain of the Deoli detention camp for the Punjab Communists was the unity achieved there.' Josh, *My Tryst with Secularism*, p. 239.

17 The Railway Union leader Mirza Ibrahim witnessed this period during which the various factions of the left coalesced in the Punjab. Interview, Mirza Ibrahim (Karachi: 1998). Josh wrote of the fear of fascism in his autobiography and others such as Prithvi Singh remember how important they felt it was to leave behind non-violent and pacifist attitudes in the face of Japanese aggression. Conservative leaders such as Rajagopalachari, and even Gandhi himself, had delivered the same public message. See pamphlet compiled by the Indian National Congress on the Congress deliberations and decisions on war policy, *Congress & War Crisis*, AICC, Allahabad, no date.

18 Hallett (United Provinces) to Linlithgow, Mss. Eur. F. 125/105, Nehru at the AITUC Conference, Cawnpore, 1 February 1942, TP, vol. 1, no. 180, pp. 219–2.

19 'The Soviet Aid Campaign. A Central Organising Committee has been set up in Calcutta. This was responsible for an inaugural All-India conference of the "Friends of the Soviet Union Society" in Calcutta on November 16th, presided over by Mian Iftikharuddin, President of the Punjab Provincial Congress Committee, and himself an ardent Communist. Some 600 persons attended including delegates from other provinces, the conference being labelled for the purposes of press publicity a gathering of "writers, artists, and intellectuals" although most of them are more familiar as Communists. Resolutions were passed pledging support for Russia and expressing India's determination to uphold the "ideal which the Soviet Union stands for"; and appointing an Organising Committee to form branches of the FSU in all provinces. A "Workers' Convention" held at the same time, called for volunteers to join the Red Army "so that thereby we can strengthen our fight for freedom". The Organising Committee consists of Iftikharuddin of the Punjab as Chairman, Jagjit Singh acting President of the All India Kisan Sabha and Prof Hiren Mukherji the Bengal Communist as Secretaries.' Summary of Communist Activity in India November–December 1941, 19 December 1941, Home Political File 7/1/41, NAI.

20 N. N. Mitra, *Indian Annual Register, 1940, Volume II, July–December* (Calcutta: Annual Register Office, 1941), pp. 89–90.

21 N. N. Mitra, *Indian Annual Register, 1939, Volume II, July–December* (Calcutta: Annual Register Office, 1940), p. 185.

22 Meeting held on 15 July 1940, in Mitra, *Indian Annual Register, 1940, Volume II, July–December*, p. 163.

23 N. N. Mitra, *Indian Annual Register, 1940, Volume II, July–December*, p. 164.

24 Kamtekar, ‘A Different War Dance’, p. 208.
25 Gangadhar Adhikari, *Food in the Punjab* (Bombay: People’s Publishing House, 1944), p. 9.
26 Ibid.
27 Note by Major General Lockfort L/PO/6/1066ff 360–1 India Office 25 February 1942, TP, vol. 1, no. 180, pp. 238–9.
28 Fortnightly Report May 1942, Home Political File 18/5/42, NAI.
29 N. N. Mitra, *Indian Annual Register, 1942, Volume I, January–June* (Calcutta: Annual Register Office, 1943), p. 344.
30 The inspection took place from 28 June to 8 July 1940. Report on Punjab Provincial Congress, AICC-61/1940, NMML.
31 The Punjab Congress president, Mian Iftikarudin, was confident that he could summon thousands of volunteers to court arrest, but only a handful even bothered to attend the volunteer training camp that he had organised to show the Congress inspector in 1940. Ibid.
32 ‘Except in the Punjab and North West Frontier Province present situation as to morale amongst Indian and in many cases European population is deplorable.’ Cripps to Churchill, Mss Eur F 125/22, New Delhi 1 April 1942, TP, vol I, No.484, pp.600–602.
33 Glancy to Viceroy L/P&J/8/597:ff168–70, 26 July 1942, TP, vol. 2, no. 331, pp. 463–5.
34 Letter to father, 16 August 1942, MSS EUR F230/18, OIOC.
35 ‘15–16 January 1942, Proceedings of Working Committee of AICCP: ‘The committee considered the representation from Congress Party in the Punjab Legislative Assembly requesting permission to attend the assembly meetings. The Committee after consulting Mian Iftikarudin and some members of the Assembly decided that in the existing circumstances no useful purpose will be served by lifting the ban against Congress members attending the Punjab Legislative Assembly. The Parliamentary Board may however permit attendance under special circumstances for specific purposes.’ Mitra, *Indian Annual Register, 1942, Volume I, January–June*, pp. 15–16.
36 Bhimsen Sachar to Abul Kalam Azad, 12 March 1942, AICC-G-1/1942, NMML.
37 Signed at Gujranwala. 9 April 1941 in AICC- p-16/1940–41 Part I, Volume I, NMML.
38 Josh, *My Tryst with Secularism*, p. 244.
39 AICC-P-16 (Part II) 1940–41, NMML.
40 Mitra, *Indian Annual Register, 1942, Volume I, January–June*, p. 332.
41 Ibid., p. 333.
42 Home Political File 226/42, Reports from Intelligence Bureau: The political situation of Communism in India in 1941, 1942, NAI.
43 Statement of Sardar Prithvi Singh on front page, *People’s War*, 2 July 1942.
44 An example of the imaginative approach adopted by the Communists is: ‘In Irrikkur, a local landlord, Govindan Nambiar, warned his labourers that if they did not resign their membership of “Anti-Jap” organisations, they wouldn’t be allowed to reap the crop. At the harvest, two hundred “anti-Jap” volunteers arrived to guard the field, wielding sticks, while fifty of them reaped the crops.’ Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South Asia*, p. 170.
45 30 October 1942, *Punjab Legislative Assembly Debates*, p. 182.
46 Report dated 4 February 1944, Intelligence Summaries India – Internal 16, IOR/L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.
47 30 October 1942, *Punjab Legislative Assembly Debates*, p. 175.
48 Extract from Punjab Police Abstract Number 38 in Fortnightly Report, September 1943, Home Political File 18/8/43, NAI.
49 Report dated 13 February 1942, Intelligence Summaries India-Internal, 15, IOR/L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.
50 Statement of Moscow Returned Ghadar Narinjan Singh in Director of Intelligence Report, 18 June 1943, Home Political File 6377/43, NAI.

51 Mitra, *Indian Annual Register, 1942, Volume I, January–June*, p. 311.
52 Communist Survey, July 1942, Communist Activity in India, 1938–45, IOR/L/PJ/12/431, OIOC.
53 Copy of a circular dated 6 July 1942 issued by the Punjab CP to all subordinate committee in Home Political File 226/42, Reports from Intelligence Bureau: The political situation of Communism in India in 1941, 1942, NAI.
54 30 October 1942, *Punjab Legislative Assembly Debates*, p. 183.
55 Javed, *Left Politics in Punjab:1935–47*, p. 198.
56 Extract from Punjab Police Abstract Number 38 in Fortnightly Report, September 1943, Home Political File 18/8/43, NAI.
57 Ibid.
58 Fortnightly Report, September 1944, Home Political File 18/9/44, NAI.
59 Report dated 20 October 1944, in Intelligence Summaries India – Internal 155, Appendix July–September 1944, IOR/L/WS/1/1433, OIOC.
60 Over Rs 40,000 were collected. *People's War*, 26 March 1944.
61 The Bengal People's Relief Committee claimed that a 'cultural squad' collected Rs 26,000 in the Punjab within a fortnight alone. Communist Survey no. 1 of 1944, 31 March 1944, Communist Activities in India 1938–45, IOR/L/PJ/12/431, OIOC.
62 S. G. Sardesai, *People's Way to Food – The Report Made before the Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of India Held in Bombay from 10th to 24th February 1943* (Bombay: People's Publishing House, 1943), p. 46.
63 After breaking down the decline in real wages in Lahore, Adhikari gives an interesting example of a successful food committee. The working class cost of living index for Lahore rose as follows:

Year	*WC cost of living index*	*rise in points*
1939	123	
1940	133	+10
1941	172	+39
1942	302	+130
1943	368	+66

Adhikari himself acquired the figures from a pamphlet published by the Board of Economic Enquiry, Punjab. These figures show clearly that, while the cost of living had gone up by 360 per cent, wages went up only by 180–200 per cent. This meant that the workers suffered a substantial cut of 44 per cent in real wages and in their standard of living. Not only the workers but other employees and the urban poor suffered during the war. In industrial cities such as Lahore scarcity and the consequent suffering of the bulk of the population were acute. Towards the end of 1942 a Food Committee movement started. Private depots were established making available relatively affordable foodgrains. Women in *purdah* came out to join the movement. The government then opened cheap *atta* depots in the cities and supplied them with wheat and *atta* brought through the cooperatives. Adhikari, 'Food in the Punjab', p. 9.
64 Home Political File 7/1/44, NAI.
65 'Punjab was far behind other states in regard to increase in the CPI membership.' Javed, *Left Politics in Punjab:1935–47*, p. 194.
66 Fortnightly Report March 1945, Home Political File 18/3/45, NAI.
67 Fortnightly Report September 1946, Home Political File, 18/9/46, NAI.
68 For example: 'In many of the towns and villages of the Punjab, women of all classes, whether educated or not, under the impact of the food situation and patriotic appeals are shedding old social prejudices. They are discarding purdah, breaking down class

snobbery and are organizing themselves. In Lahore, Punjab's principal city, there are today 3000 members of the Women's Self Defence League. This League is busy setting up women's *mohala* committees to manage food depots and organize rationing of sugar. It runs reading rooms for women which has marked a revolutionary step forward in the lives and thoughts of those who go there. In addition it has formed newspaper reading rooms for women.' *People's War*, 29 August 1943.

69 Fortnightly Report September 1944, Home Political File 18/9/44, NAI.
70 Ibid.
71 Interview, Tahira Ali (Lahore: 1998).
72 About the Punjab, a pamphlet claimed: 'We have an audience that amounted to 40,000, about 10 to 15 thousand per night. We have in all produced 18 plays to 60,000 people of which 57,000 were Kisans and 8,000 townspeople.' C.P.I., 'Indian People's Theatre Association: Bulletin No. 1' (Bombay: People's Publishing House, 1943), p. 25. Interestingly, the pamphlet also states: 'The Punjab peasant has but a primitive sense of humour which is always taken into consideration by the dramatic companies' (p. 23).
73 Interview, Abdullah Malik (Lahore: 1998).
74 Chief Secretary to Government of Punjab to All Deputy Commissioners in the Punjab, 4 May 1943, Home Political File 7/23/43, Policy of Communist Party of India, NAI.
75 Communist Survey, January–March 1943, Communist Activity in India, 1938–45, IOR/L/PJ/12/431, OIOC.
76 *People's War*, 2 August 1942.
77 Josef Stalin, 'The National Question and Leninism', in *Stalin's Works* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1929), p. 348.
78 Statement of Sardar Prithvi Singh on front page, *People's War*, 2 July 1942.
79 G. Adhikari, *National Unity Report* on the resolution on Pakistan and National Unity before the enlarged Plenum of the Centre Committee Party of India in September 1942, ACH.
80 Gangadhar Adhikari, *Pakistan and National Unity* (Bombay: People's Publishing House, 1942), p. 35; Adhikari, *National Unity Report*.
81 Report dated 11 June 1944, Home Political(I) File 7/6/44, Policy Towards *People's War*, NAI.
82 Communist Survey Number 2 of 1944, June 30 1944, IOR/L/PJ/12/431, Communist Activity in India, 1938–45, OIOC.
83 Ibid.
84 N. N. Mitra, *Indian Annual Register, 1944, Volume I, January–June* (Calcutta: Annual Register Office, 1945), p. 240.
85 Fortnightly Report June 1944, Home Political File 18/6/44, Doc. 137 in *Towards Freedom: Documents on the Movement for Independence in India 1943–1944*, ed. P. S. Gutpa (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 1709.
86 N. N. Mitra, *Indian Annual Register, 1943, Volume II, July–December* (Calcutta: Annual Register Office, 1944), p. 181.
87 Some prominent Sikh leaders including Sardar Baldev Singh Development Minister issued the following statement: 'We declare that Sjt Rajagopalachari's formula for communal settlement which has been approved by Gandhi is manifestly unfair, inequitable and detrimental to the best interest of the country in general and the Sikhs in particular. Any communal settlement without the expressed consent of the Sikh community shall not be binding on them and we expect that the Sikhs will oppose with all their might any such arrangement.' N. N. Mitra, *Indian Annual Register, 1944, Volume II, July–December* (Calcutta: Annual Register Office, 1945), p. 211.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid., p. 216.
90 Fortnightly Report October 1945, Home Political File 18/10/45, NAI.
91 For example, G. Adhikari, *Sikh Homeland through Hindu–Muslim–Sikh Unity*

(Bombay: People's Publishing House, 1945), p. 5. As early as 1944 communists were seen to be reconsidering their attitude towards their Akalis rivals. For example, 'Whether or not Communists have been influenced by increasing Akali propaganda denouncing them as atheists, they have begun to realise that the methods to tackling the Akali problem and their attitude of opposition to the Azad Punjab scheme are producing no results and it appears that they are now thinking of revising their policy towards the Akali party with a view to using the Akalis as a weapon for their own ends. This policy, if adopted, will accept the Sikh demand for self-determination and the previous Communist slogan of Congress–Muslim League unity will be expanded to include the Akalis. The communist aim will be to make the Akali Party, which they recognise as the most powerful Sikh party in the Punjab, into a strong democratic national organisation of the Sikhs and they will presumably employ their familiar methods of selecting suitable members to do propaganda and make contacts, enter the party through sympathisers and finally capture it by overthrowing the present leadership. In this last endeavour they will probably have the sympathy, if not the active assistance, of the Nagoke group and of other nationalist Sikhs who are showing signs of dissatisfaction with master Tara Singh's leadership and who are jealous of his chief lieutenant, Giani Kartar Singh.' Fortnightly Report February 1944, Home Political File 18/2/44, NAI.

92 Similarly, in the previous year, communists 'who had continuous representation on the SGPC since 1925 failed to elect a single member.' Singh, *Communism in Punjab*, p. 92.

93 Fortnightly Report February 1946, Home Political File 18/2/46, NAI.

94 Communist Survey January–March 1943, Communist Activity in India, 1938–45, IOR/L/PJ/12/431, OIOC.

95 'The lessons for us are the following:– . . . 2. check all "left" mistakes in our agitation. The tendency where we are weak and especially in Congress areas is yet to make "left" speeches, abstract anti-Government speeches. All this must be changed. We have not got to teach our people to be anti-Gov. they are already anti-Gov and agitation of the old type is to demonstrate our ignorance of the deep anti-British feelings of our people, failing to learn how much politicisation has taken place in the last 4 years. All our agitators must learn to speak from real life and not begin with "P' line" ie. seek to rouse patriotism by a general anti-Government harangue. The best agitator for today must: know about the people's life concerning the issue he is speaking on, he must describe the sufferings of the people; c) he must rouse patriotism not by shouting against the Government but by appealing to all patriots to unite. Patriotism in a negative sense (anti-Government hatred) is already there and it by itself only leads to helplessness: "the blasted Government is there, what can we do" type of argument. Existing patriotism needs being activised through the positive appeal for unity and call for constructive effort to save our people, and thus our patriotism will get a positive democratic content.' Copy of Circular Number 24/25, 1/6/1945 issued by P. C. Joshi in Bombay to subordinate Communist organizations. Communist Survey Number 5, Communist Activities in India 1938–45, IOR/L/PJ/12/431, OIOC.

96 Fortnightly Report July 1945, Home Political File 18/7/45, NAI.

97 'The party will put up its own candidates where success is certain or probable; also where it can hope to oppose successfully any of its prominent opponents. Elsewhere, it will support Congress against the Hindu Mahasabha or loyalist candidates; it will support the Muslim League in all Muslim seats against any rivals; and it will support the best and most popular Scheduled caste candidates.' Fortnightly Report October 1945, Home Political File 18/10/45, NAI.

98 The report continues: 'They are making every effort to secure amendment of the rule debarring those candidates from contesting the elections whose names were not included in the old list of voters as they represent that the enforcement of this rule will be a severe blow to their election prospects.' Fortnightly Report November 1945,

Home Political File 18/11/45, NAI. The various strategies adopted to garner support are indicated in the following report. 'The attendance varied from 3–5000 during the actual conference but increased to 8000 in the evenings when dramas were staged. The audiences were far more attracted by the girls who took part in the dramatic performances than by the rather prosy speeches, although the anti-Unionist and anti-police references well received.' Fortnightly Report October 1945, Home Political Report 18/10/45, NAI.

99 Communist Survey October–December 1942, Communist Activity in India, 1938–45, IOR/L/PJ/12/431, OIOC. However, the outlook was bleak, as can be gauged from the following report: 'The communists election campaign continues, but the outlook for them at the moment is not very hopeful. They had clearly underestimated the strength of the Akalis in the rural areas, and they are now faced with the prospect of this strength being reinforced with Congress support in the Sikh constituencies if a Congress–Akali agreement materialises. They have already lost ground amongst the Sikh masses in spite of their persistent propaganda and attempts to win over the Babbar Akalis to their side and some of their best Sikh candidates have been debarred from contesting the elections.' Fortnightly Report May 1945, Home Political File 18/5/45, NAI.

100 Fortnightly Report May 1942, Home Political File 18/5/42, NAI.

101 Fortnightly Report March 1944, Home Political File 18/35/44, NAI.

102 Fortnightly Report May 1945, Home Political File 18/5/45, NAI.

Conclusion

1 See J. S. Brar, *The Communist Party in Punjab (The Politics of Survival)* (New Delhi: National Book Organisation, 1989), pp. 195–235.

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