

officials and supporters were singled out and killed. Encounters with the police took place during which some rare feats of daring and self-sacrifice were performed by Babbar Akālīs.

The government acted with firmness and eagerness. In April 1923, the Babbar Akālī Jathā was declared an unlawful association under the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1908. Units of cavalry and infantry were stationed at strategic points in the sensitive areas, with magistrates on duty with them. A joint force of military and special police was created to seize Babbars sheltering themselves in the Shivālik (ਸ਼ਿਵਾਲਿਕ) hills. Every two weeks, propaganda leaflets were dropped from airplanes with a view to strengthening the morale of the loyalist population. Punitive police-post tax was levied and disciplinary action was taken against civil and military pensioners harboring or sympathizing with the Babbar Akālīs. These measures helped in curbing the movement. The arrests and deaths, in police encounters, of its members depleted the *Jathā*'s ranks. The movement virtually came to an end when Varyām Singh (ਵਰਯਾਮ ਸਿੰਘ) was run down by the police in Lāyalpur district in June 1924.

The trial of the arrested Babbar Akālīs had already begun inside Lāhaur Central Jail on 15 August 1923. Sixty-two persons were challenged originally and the names of thirty-six more were added in January 1924. Of them two died during investigations and five were acquitted by the investigating magistrates; the remaining 91 were committed to the sessions in April 1924. Mr J.K.M. Tapp, appointed additional session Judge to try conspiracy cases, opened the proceedings on 2 June 1924. He was assisted by four assessors. Divān Bahādur Piṇḍī Dās (ਬਹਾਦੁਰ ਪਿੰਡੀ ਦਾਸ) was special public prosecutor. The prosecution produced 447 witnesses, 734 documents and 228 other exhibits to prove its case. The judgment was delivered on 28 February 1925. Of the ninety-one accused, two had died in jail during trial, thirty-four were acquitted, six including Jathedār Kishan Singh Garḡajj were awarded death penalty and the remaining forty-nine were sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment. The government, not satisfied with the punishments awarded, filed a revision petition in the High Court. The High Court overruled the Sessions Court judgment on a few points, but let the death sentences remain unaltered. Babbars, so condemned, were hanged on 27 February 1926. They were Kishan Singh Garḡajj, Santā (ਸੰਤਾ) Singh, Dalīp (ਦਲੀਪ) Singh, Karam (ਕਰਮ) Singh, Nand (ਨੰਦ) Singh and Dharam Hayātpur (ਧਰਮ ਹਯਾਤਪੁਰ). The Babbar Akālī Jathā ceased to exist, but it had left a permanent mark on the history of the Sikhs and of the nationalist movement of India. The Naujvān (ਨੌਜਵਾਨ) and Kirtī Kisān (ਕਿਰਤੀ ਕਿਸਾਨ) movements in the Pañjāb owed their militant policy and tactics to the Babbar insurrection.

Adapted from: The Encyclopedia of Sikhism by Harbans Singh.

Bhagat Singh (ਭਗਤ ਸਿੰਘ) Reading

Bhagat Singh was a revolutionary who was born on 27 September 1907 at the village of Baṅgā (ਬੰਗਾ), Lāilpur (ਲਾਇਲਪੁਰ) district (now in Pakistan) and he is the second son of Kishan Singh (ਕਿਸ਼ਨ ਸਿੰਘ) and Vidyā Vatī (ਵਿਦਿਆ ਵਤੀ). Bhagat Singh was infused, from childhood itself, with the family's spirit of patriotism. At the time of his birth, his father was in jail for his connection with the Canal Colonization Bill agitation, in which Bhagat Singh's uncle took a leading part. His father, who was a supporter of the Gadar (ਗਦਰ) campaign of 1914-1915, inspired Bhagat Singh to become an avid admirer of the leaders of the movement. Then the execution of Kartār Singh Sarābhā (ਕਰਤਾਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਰਾਭਾ) (a young revolutionary during the Gadar movement) made a deep impression on the young mind of Bhagat Singh, who vowed to dedicate his life to the country.

From a very young age, Bhagat Singh displayed his passion for freeing Hindostān from British rule. During his college times, his parents planned to have him married. He completely rejected the suggestion and said that, "if his marriage was to take place in Slave-India, my bride shall be only death." Rather than discussing his feeling further with his parents he decided to leave home and settle in Kanpur (ਕਾਨਪੁਰ) where he took up a job in the Pratāp (ਪ੍ਰਤਾਪ) Press. In his spare time, he studied revolutionary literature. He also joined the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association, a radical group. Later, when he was assured by his parents that he did not have to marry and could continue to pursue his passion of freedom for his motherland he returned to his home in Lāhaur.

In March 1926, when Naujvān Bhārat Sabhā (ਨੌਜਵਾਨ ਭਾਰਤ ਸਭਾ) was formed, Bhagat Singh became one of the principal organizers and its secretary. After one of the leaders in the movement against British Rāj, Lālā Lājpat Rāi (ਲਾਲਾ ਲਾਜਪਤ ਰਾਇ), died during a protest, Bhagat Singh and his associates made a plan to assassinate Mr. Scott, the Superintendent of Police. They believed that the injuries caused by the police were the direct cause of Lālā Lājpat Rāi's death. However, instead of assassinating Mr. Scott, J.P. Saunders became the victim because of mistaken identification.

Since Bhagat Singh's life was in danger, he escaped to Kalkattā (ਕਲਕੱਤਾ) disguised as a wealthy person. He remained quiet for several months but became active again when certain Bills were being debated in Dillī. When his group decided to explode a bomb to express their disapproval of the bill, Bhagat Singh and B.K. Datt (ਬੀ. ਕੇ. ਦੱਤ) volunteered to carry out the plan. They were taken into custody shortly after exploding the harmless bomb. No one was seriously injured. Both were found guilty and sentenced to life in prison. After his sentence for the Assembly Bomb case was pronounced, he began waiting for his trial for the Saunders Murder case. While he was awaiting his trial in Lāhaur (ਲਾਹੌਰ) jail, he started a hunger strike on behalf of the political prisoners. The fast continued for some time even after the hearings of the Saunders Murder case, and many others joined in. It was not until one of the prisoners, J.N. Dās (ਜੇ. ਐਨ. ਦਾਸ) died that the hunger-strike was abandoned and some new facilities were promised.

It is interesting to note that during Bhagat Singh's trials he offered no defense, but utilized the occasion to propagate his ideal for freedom. He and his fellow accused kept delaying the proceedings by refusing to appear before the court, by ignoring what was going on, or by disrupting work by shouting revolutionary slogans. On 7 October 1930, Bhagat Singh was given the death sentence and was hanged on 23 March 1931.

Udham Singh (ਉਧਮ ਸਿੰਘ)

Udham Singh (ਉਧਮ ਸਿੰਘ) (1899-1940)

Udham Singh, a revolutionary nationalist, was born Sher Singh (ਸ਼ੇਰ ਸਿੰਘ) on 26 December 1899, at Sunam (ਸੁਨਾਮ), in the then princely state of Patialā. His father, Tahal Singh, was at that time working as a watchman at a railway crossing in the neighboring village of Upall (ਉਪੱਲ). Sher Singh lost his parents before he was seven years and was admitted, along with his brother Muktā Singh, to the Central Khālsā Orphanage at Amritsar on 24 October 1907. As both brothers were administered the Sikh initiation ceremony at the orphanage, they received new names, Sher Singh becoming Udham Singh and Muktā Singh became Sadhū Singh. In 1917, Udham Singh's brother also died, leaving him alone in the world.

Udham Singh left the orphanage after passing the matriculation examination (Grade 10) in 1918. He was present in the Jaliānwālā Bāg (ਜਲਿਆਂਵਾਲਾ ਬਾਗ) on the fateful Vaisākhī day, 13 April 1919, when a peaceful assembly of people was fired upon by General Reginald Edward Harry Dyer, killing over one thousand people. The event, which Udham Singh used to recall with anger and sorrow, turned him on to the path of revolution. Soon after, he left Hindostān and went to the United States of America. He felt thrilled to learn about the militant activities of the Babar Akālīs in the early 1920's, and returned home. He had secretly brought some revolvers with him and, being found out, was arrested by the police in Amritsar and sentenced to four years imprisonment under the Arms Act. On release in 1931, he returned to his native Sunam but, harassed by the local police, he once again returned to Amritsar and opened a shop as a signboard painter.

Udham Singh was deeply influenced by the activities of Bhagat Singh and his revolutionary group. In 1935, when he was on a visit to Kashmīr, he was found carrying Bhagat Singh's portrait. He loved to sing political songs. After staying for some months in Kashmīr, Udham Singh left Hindostān. He wandered the continent for some time and reached England by the mid-thirties. He was on the lookout for an opportunity to avenge the Jaliānwālā Bāg tragedy. The long-awaited moment came at last on 13 March 1940. On that day, at 4.30 p.m. in the Caxton Hall, London, where a meeting of the East India Association was being held in conjunction with the Royal Central Asian Society, Udham Singh fired five to six shots from his pistol at Sir Michael O'Dwyer, who was governor of the Punjab when the Amritsar massacre had taken place. O'Dwyer was hit twice and fell dead while Lord Zetland, the Secretary of State for India, who was presiding over the meeting, was injured. Udham Singh was overpowered with a smoking revolver in his hand. He, in fact, made no attempt to escape and continued saying that he had done his duty by his country.

On 1 April 1940, Udham Singh was formally charged with the murder of Sir Michael O'Dwyer. On 4 June 1940, he was committed to trial, at the Central Criminal Court, Old Bailey, before Justice Atkinson, who sentenced him to death. An appeal was filed on his behalf, which was dismissed on 15 July 1940. On 31 July 1940, Udham Singh was hanged in Pentonville Prison in London.

Udham Singh was essentially a man of action and, save his statement before the judge at his trial, there was no writing from his pen available to historians. Recently, letters written by him to Shiv Singh Jauhal during his days in prison, after the shooting of Sir Michael O'Dwyer, have been discovered and published. These letters show him as a man of great courage, with a sense of humor. He called himself a guest of His Majesty King George, and he looked upon death as a bride he was going to wed. By remaining cheerful to the last and going joyfully to the gallows, he followed the example of Bhagat Singh.

Here are some excerpts from his speech from the trial:

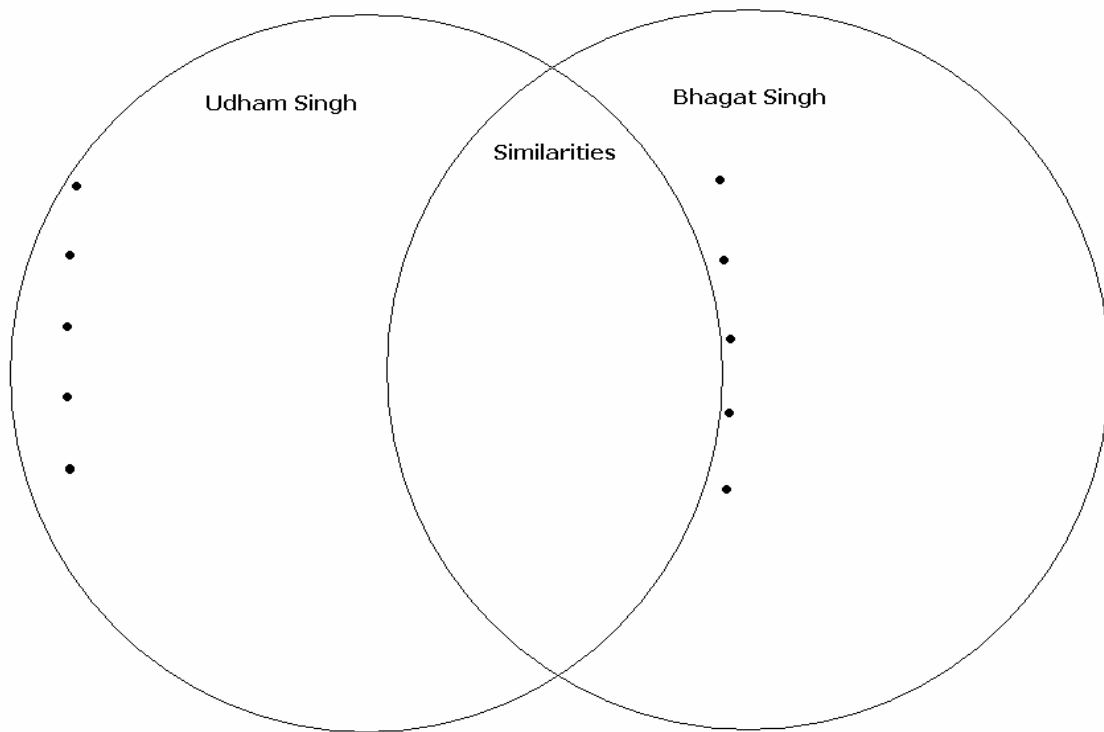
Udham Singh (Shouting): “I do not care about sentence of death. It means nothing at all. I do not care about dying or anything. I do not worry about it at all. I am dying for a purpose.” Thumping the rail of the dock, he exclaimed, “We are suffering from the British Empire.” Udham Singh continued more quietly. “I am not afraid to die. I am proud to die, to have to free my native land and I hope that when I am gone, I hope that in my place will come thousands of my countrymen to drive you dirty dogs out; to free my country.”

“Machine guns on the streets of India mow down thousands of poor women and children wherever your so-called flag of democracy and Christianity flies.”

“Your conduct, your conduct—I am talking about the British government. I have nothing against the English people at all. I have more English friends, living in England than I have in India. I have great sympathy with the workers of England. I am against the Imperialist Government.”



Adapted from: Singh, Harbans, The Encyclopedia of Sikhism

Venn Diagram

Jalīānwālā Bāg (ਜਲਿਆਂਵਾਲਾ ਬਾਗ)

On Vaisākhī (ਵੈਸਾਖੀ) day (the Sikh Harvest Festival) on 13 April 1919, about 25,000 men, women and children, including Hindūs, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians had gathered for a peaceful protest meeting against a set of draconian laws known as the Rowlatt Act, which gave the British rulers sweeping powers such as press-censorship, detention without trial, and arrest without warrant. A British officer named Brig-Gen Reginald Dyer, blocked the only exit from the enclosure and, without any warning, ordered his troops to fire into the crowd. Official records said 379 people were killed and 1,200 wounded but Indian sources insisted the toll was much higher, with over a thousand dead. This sparked off the freedom movement under the leadership of M.K.Gāndhī.

V SUNDARAM

Thinking questions:

1. What were Bhagat (ਭਗਤ) Singh and Udham (ਉਧਮ) Singh's goals as revolutionaries?
2. How many of you would actually be able to do what Bhagat Singh and Udham Singh did at that time. Why or why not? Be honest.
3. Do you believe their strong belief eventually in Sikhī (ਸਿਖੀ) provided them with the courage they needed to complete their tasks? Explain.
4. Do you think when you study about M.K. Gāndhī (ਐਮ. ਕੇ. ਗਾਂਧੀ) in your history classes you should also study about Bhagat Singh and Udham Singh? Why or why not?

Optional Reading

Medgar Wiley Evers was born 2 July 1925 in Mississippi. He went to school at the Alcorn College. There he was a member of the debate team, choir, track team, and football team. He was listed in the “Who’s Who in American Colleges.”

Working for the NAACP

He served in the United States Army during World War II from 1935 through 1945. When he returned to the US, he met Myrlie Beasley and they married in 1951. Soon after he returned, he received his Bachelor of Arts degree and he began setting up local chapters of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP.) He also organized boycotts against gas stations that did not let Blacks use their restrooms. He then worked as an insurance agent until 1954 when segregation was declared unconstitutional.

Discrimination in College

Evers then tried to get into the University of Mississippi Law School and was rejected. He felt that discrimination was the reason. This did get the attention of the NAACP, however, and that same year they appointed him as Mississippi’s first field secretary.

Evers and his wife then moved to Jackson, Mississippi, to set up an NAACP office. There he investigated violent crimes that were committed against Blacks and tried to think of ways to prevent them. He also conducted campaigns to help Blacks to become registered voters. In the 1960s he set up boycotts against certain merchants and this attracted national attention. He also tried to have his friend admitted to the University of Mississippi in 1962, but he too was denied admission. This finally brought the federal help that Evers was looking for and led to his friend being finally admitted to the university. This was a major event for civil rights and Evers was thrilled. Evers was a civil rights leader trying to gain equality for the Blacks in his state.

Violence Breaks Out

Unfortunately, not everyone was as happy as Evers. A riot started on the campus and four people died. Hatred for Evers grew among many people. There were many problems between the Blacks and Whites such as brutal fights.

Evers was assassinated on 12 June 1963, at the age of 38 in front of his home in Jackson as he returned from work. Evers’ wife and children heard the shots and ran to the front door where they saw him lying in a pool of blood with his keys in his hand. Both Blacks and Whites came from all over the nation for his funeral. Evers was buried with other heroes in the Arlington National Cemetery.

The Trial of Evers’ Murderer

Evers’ brother Charles took over the position of field secretary for the NAACP and later he served as the Mayor of Fayette, Mississippi from 1969 through 1981.

Byron De La Beckwith, a member of the Ku Klux Klan, was tried for the murder on two occasions and both resulted in a hung jury. However, he was finally sentenced to life in prison in 1994. De La Beckwith openly mocked the law enforcement for not being able to convict him for over 25 years. Then, finally, in 1989 a reporter ran across records that revealed that a secret background check had been done on the jurors in the first two trials.

An assistant district attorney, Bobby DeLaughter, finally got new evidence which convicted De La Beckwith. Some of the evidence was from witnesses who placed him near the murder scene, some heard him admit that he killed Evers, the gun was found with Beckwith’s fingerprints, and the