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The Ghost of Amritsar

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THE GHOST OF AMRITSAR

by

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ABSTRACT

The Ghost of Amritsar is a historical-fiction novel set in the British Raj during the first half of the 20th century. Through the lens of a Punjabi revolutionary, this thesis explores some of the roles played by the diverse identities of the Indian subcontinent during the Indian independence movement and the violence that followed the Partition of 1947. By observing the history of India and the British Raj, *The Ghost of Amritsar* attempts to analyze the period's violence with a human, empathetic, approach.

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Jathai had given up on struggling. His wrists and ankles were raw from their restraints, and his shirt was drenched in sweat from the exhausting summer heat. Certainly, he thought, it could be much worse. His captors had not blindfolded him—though there was nothing interesting in the room to observe—nor had they gagged him—though there was no use in crying for help. Indeed, Kashmir's summers bring about an uncomfortable warmth, but Jathai was used to the far crueller oppression of the Punjabi sun. He only wished for a little water to alleviate his excruciating thirst. Food would be too hopeful.

He suspected that he was in an extra room of someone's house. It had been stripped of any decorations or furniture, leaving the space bland and grey. Jathai felt as though it had been many hours since the last time he had seen another person. Maybe a day had almost passed; or, perhaps, days? He had been floating between consciousness and a restless sleep for quite a while now, and the windowless room offered no insight into how long had passed. Only one small lamp, placed on the table in front of him, produced all of the room's insufficient lighting. He did not dwell on his uncertainty; it now made little difference to him.

Jathai wondered if he would die of thirst before seeing another human. It would be easier, he thought, than having to face his captors again. He did not want to be re-interrogated, or to say anything at all for that matter. If he was to die in this unfamiliar land, he did not wish for it to be at the hands of the enemy. Less than a week ago, Jathai had fancied himself a righteous and stalwart warrior of his nation. His capture, however, had drained his resolve and replaced action with time; and with time comes reflection. He reminisced about the proudest days of his life—

now over two decades ago—before India had set itself ablaze; back when he would call anyone with courage and determination a comrade, irrespective of their faith. His past self, Jathai knew, would be crushed by what he—and so many others—had become. Still, if he could relive the past few months, he doubted that he would live them any differently.

The door to Jathai's windowless room suddenly, but slowly, creaked open. His muscles tensed and he regained his vigilance. He was disappointed; his wish for a solitary death, it seemed, might not be granted after all. A tall man with a strong appearance stepped into the room and closed the door behind him. He had a thick, black, moustache and a martial appearance to his face. He wore a shawl, weathered by use, and a white turban. The man strangely eyed his hostage with an air of inquisitiveness, but also—Jathai noticed—a look of unease or shock.

In all of Jathai's previous encounters with his captors, the men had been harsh, direct, and intimidating. Something about this new character drew Jathai out of his state of passive acceptance. When the odd figure had completed his slow and cautious approach to the table, he pulled out a chair across from Jathai and—with the same leaden pace—sat down. Then, for an uncomfortably prolonged moment, both men silently watched each other. The man stared hard into Jathai's eyes, but also examined the rest of his hostage. It did not seem as though he was sizing Jathai up but, rather, it was as if the man thought that his own eyes were deceiving him.

Having already made peace with his expectations of a rapidly approaching demise, and wishing to uncover the cause of this man's curious disposition, Jathai took it upon himself to break the suspense.

"What is your name?" he did not feel the need to offer his own, as the previous interrogator had surely shared the information.

"Hasan."

“Well, Hasan, are you going to kill me?”

Without answering the question, Hasan procured a long and curved knife, from a sheath that had been concealed under his shawl, and placed it on the table between himself and Jathai. “I know who you claim to be, Jathai, but—save the part of me which implores my mind to believe in fantasies and myths—I know that you are a deceiver.”

Jathai’s heart skipped a beat, for he now suspected that he knew the source of Hasan’s apprehension; but he was unsure how to proceed. “I feel as though I am at somewhat of a disadvantage, for I do not know what I have done. What is this lie that you attribute to me?”

“You have told us that your name is Jathai; that you come from Lahore and, before that, Amritsar. You have said that you were in the IFA, and affirmed that you knew the Bengali, Sachindranath. If I am to believe the claims that your co-conspirators have made, or the rumours that have spread through Jammu and Kashmir, then perhaps the identity you claim is truly yours. But, then, the deceit is not in claiming to be Jathai, but in what it means to be him; for Jathai of Amritsar, as I have been told, is dead.”

“I shall clear up any confusion you may have, but I will begin by saying that the stories you have heard are all true,” Jathai replied, only exasperating Hasan’s perplexion. “My name *is* Jathai, and I *am* the same Amritsari of whom you have heard so much. Truthfully, I never had any desire for the events of my life to be so widely told, nor was I originally aware that they were being spread. In the 20s, you see, I came to be acquainted with a clever revolutionary named Sachindranath, who you already know of. When we eventually parted ways, Sachindranath—believing that I could no longer contribute to the revolution—decided to manufacture a means by which he could still make use of me. He left Amritsar, around the same

time that I did, and travelled throughout the Punjab and into Kashmir, where he distributed my life in the form of a heroic and nationalistic narrative.

"Now, Sachindranath was a resourceful man and, knowing that he could not make the most out of my name without a touch of exaggeration, he embellished my character and personality to best fit that of an uncommonly zealous revolutionary. I am sure that you have heard of my cold bloodedness, my fiery passion, and my emotional conviction to my people's cause. I am sure that, from the stories Sachindranath has peddled, my reputation struck fear into the hearts of you and your comrades. But I do not think that Sachindranath had exaggerated nearly as much as he was convinced.

"I am the murderer you know me to be. I am the same dacoit, the same nationalist, and the same zealot that has been portrayed in these rumours. If I could free myself from these restraints, I do not think that I would hesitate to seize that blade and take your life. If I could escape from this detainment, I believe that I would return to my comrades and continue our war against you. I have planned to die for my cause and—though it pains me to recall the brotherhood of the revolution—I fear that, to meaningfully further my cause, only the blood of India's enemies will suffice. I have walked the path of moderation before. For some time, it protects your soul and distorts reality into a palatable facade; but take my advice, Hasan: when the consequences of your inaction finally surface, there are no comforts nor conveniences that can save your sanity."

Jathai's words returned Hasan to his speechless awe. The Amritsari was correct; the rumours about this ghost had unnerved Hasan and many of the other Muslims throughout Jammu and Kashmir. But he had heard Jathai's story long before the first blood of Partition, and he had once admired him, as a hero, for his dedication to the freedom of India above all else.

“But you cannot be Jathai!” Hasan incredulously exclaimed. “Jathai sacrificed himself, shoulder to shoulder with Sikhs, atheists, *and Muslims*! These were his brothers. But you are here in Kashmir, a foreigner, come to wage your holy war. You would oppress us, subject us to the will of a Hindu majority, no differently than the British tyrants we once joined forces to expel. So do not defile the legacy of a martyr—of a true nationalist—who’s memory gives hope for an end to this madness.”

“Do you remember when Jinnah defended Lokmanya in the Raj’s courts?” asked Jathai. “When I was young I did not care so much about politics, but I can recall my father talking about these things. I believe it happened on more than one occasion; Jinnah is truly an exceptional legal mind. I remember, too, the great force that Gandhi, Jinnah, and Nehru, together in the Congress, represented. Nehru and Jinnah, once united against the Raj, now lead their separate nations against each other. How would Muhammad Ali Jinnah and that radical Hindu, Lokmanya Tilak, greet one another today, if Tilak was still alive? I, too, remember when we fought against the British together, Hasan; but, I wonder if we were ever truly one people.”

“Regardless, Jathai is dead. So explain to me, unless you declare yourself to be an apparition, how you are sitting here in front of me.”

“As I have said, all that you have heard is true. I will recount to you—should you be willing to listen—the true story of my life. Much of what you believe about Jathai of Amritsar will be affirmed, and some things may far exceed your expectations. I implore you not to withhold your judgement; I have come to acknowledge my many failures. Ask yourself, nonetheless, if you would have fallen into the temptations of my mistakes—if you could have balanced the irrationality of true rage with the obligations of a just man.”

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I never experienced a Hindu upbringing. In the city of Sikhism, in the province of Islam, in the nation of Hinduism, I was an unnatural anomaly. My parents both belonged to high caste families, and I, too, enjoyed the many privileges of our status. Some years before my birth, however, my father forsook our heritage and converted—in both faith and conduct—to Christianity. My mother, who had never been especially religious herself, allowed our homelife to reflect my father's choice. In all meaningful ways, I always felt like I related more to her than my father. I would have relished the chance to become more familiar with my mother's convictions; I would have liked to ask her more questions about her own life and her own beliefs, when my cultural and political consciousness had matured, had she not been ripped, so suddenly, from my life.

Though a passive and tolerant man, so much of my youth seemed to have been dominated by my father. He led an impressive career as a judge in the Amritsari courts for over thirty years; a position, when held correctly, of great influence. But I would not say that my father *did* hold this position correctly. A worshipper of the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League, he was the combination of only the worst parts of Gandhi and Jinnah: adamantly revering nonviolence and Truth, while clinging to a subservient commitment to order and the law. A failure to his people, the Raj saw my father as the perfect accomplice to their tyranny.

The key to being treated well, by bigots and racists, is to treat oneself as inferior and save them the trouble of needing to remind you. My father was spineless in his interactions with the English. In his defence, I do not believe his behaviour was motivated by cowardice or self-

deprecation. Rather, he genuinely believed in the superiority of Western thought, technology, culture, and governance. India, in his eyes, had devolved from its once great past; he dreamed of a future in which India's people could ascend to the societal standards of their European masters.

Nonetheless, if you can believe me, he was a nationalist. He would often rave about the accomplishments of Congress and the League's elites. Whether he was naturally similar to Jinnah, or he had fashioned himself in their likeness, I was never quite sure. Either way, they differed only in religion. Even in appearance, they resembled one another. Tall and slender, my father was always clad in European attire (mainly grey suits and European shoes).

For most of my youth—while I still attended the missionary school—I was too naive to deconstruct or form my own opinions about the subjects my father would speak about when he returned from court. I remember, for instance, my teenage self feeling only bewilderment over the vigour of his celebration when, in 1916, news of the Lucknow Pact swept the nation.

"This is a monumental affair!" he declared. "With the union of the Congress and the League must come an organisation and dedication of the likes our nation has never seen. Jinnah's influence is, undoubtedly, cooling the extremism of Mr. Tilak and his supporters. Mark my words, we will see change—real change!"

"Or, perhaps, Lokmanya has fanned the flames of Jinnah and the League." my mother replied.

"If Tilak is the one imparting influence, then may God guide him."

"Well, one thing is certain: India is truly ready for progress, and we will all need guidance."

My mother was right. The atmosphere in Amritsar, and in all of India, was rapidly changing. Even in my apolitical stupor, I could tell that dissatisfaction with the Raj was

permeating all of the more intellectual conversations that surrounded me. Indeed, the union of the Congress and the Muslim League was no small feat, and the Lucknow Pact could not have been possible without the ever growing sense of unity among our leaders; but the increasing boldness of the Congress and the League did not come without a cost. The English would not sit idly by as the forces of India joined under the cause of Swaraj.

How unique of a moment in our history that decade was! And yet, I was deaf to my nation's cries for action. In Europe and in Africa, our brave warriors were spilling their blood for the pride of India. For many—but not, apparently, myself—the War had served as an eye opener to the disgraceful character of Britain. In the Empire's time of need, India had responded with a resounding loyalty. Voluntarily, our soldiers left their homes to fight the Europeans' conflict, and still, we did not receive the slightest respect from our rulers. To India, the War was an opportunity to earn our way into fair treatment under the Raj but, to the British, the War was an excuse to tighten its grip.

While the Raj implemented its policies of restriction and repression, I regret to admit that no sense of urgency blossomed within me. I will partially excuse my foolishness on account of my age—I was born in 1900—but, I fear, the truth behind my numbness came from the same complacency that had infected too many of our people. It is a heavy burden to the activist and the freedom fighter when the masses continue their unjust existence without complaint.

There was, however, a defining moment in a high-caste youth's life when their eyes were opened to the realities of the Raj. The wealth of India is not equally distributed, and there is too much comfort—too much to be preserved—in the life of a Brahmin to encourage them to question the very foundations upon which their prosperity has been built. My needs and desires had been amply accounted for; I had a decent education at the missionary school; my family

lived in a large home with servants and excellent food; and my father had already arranged for me to study law in London. Such privileges do not typically inspire much rebelliousness or dissatisfaction among their beneficiaries. Until I had set out to accomplish things for myself, until I had left the shelter of my home, I had not understood that the affluence of an Indian meant nothing to our British tyrants. But my defining moment of realisation was quickly approaching.

The blindness that had characterised so many of my developmental years was made up for by the vision of my mother. I suspect that she would have participated in many acts of satyagraha—and likely would have been arrested on more than one occasion—had it not been for the influence of my father. For the sake of his career and, to an extent, his politics, she limited her involvement in protests and demonstrations. She did, nonetheless, attend a number of larger events, though she always made sure to keep a low profile and avoid getting into any trouble with the law. Still, her innocuous participation concerned my father—even I noticed—but he was neither a forceful nor controlling man, and never pressured her to abandon her political activity.

"India is as unified in means of protest as it is in culture and religion," she had told me. "Do not think that your father is any less of a patriot than I, simply on account of the differences in our methods. We need men in positions of power who have their people's best interests at heart; and you do not remain in power very long if you denounce the British every weekend."

She would often give me insights into the politics of India but, at the time, I had little interest in the subject. Understand that, in my youth, I did not simply lack any passions; beginning in my early teenage years, I became preoccupied with an obsession over languages and religions. It is difficult to grow up in Amritsar without any education in Islam, Sikhism, or Hinduism, and—if I could not learn about any of these three faiths in my own home—it became my duty to inform myself as a way of masking my unusual relationship with religion. I would

read different scriptures—in Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu, Sanskrit and English—and translate them into the different languages I knew.

This self-education of mine lacked a meaningful diversification of texts. Perhaps I would have properly valued my mother's wisdom had I used my time to read and translate the works of the likes of Rabindranath Tagore, Annie Besant, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, and Lala Lajput Rai. Nevertheless, my mother took note of my love for reading and writing, and she did everything in her power to encourage me. During the last years before my departure to London, my mother even hired a private tutor to help me master my English.

1919, the year of my departure, was characterised by political shockwaves that even I, in my secluded fortress of books, could not escape from. My ever moderate father grew increasingly distressed by the escalation of the people's dissatisfaction—and, I believe, by the escalation of his own sense of responsibility to India—while my mother applauded the boldness of the masses. And yet, I still made no effort to learn about these constant rumblings about the "Rowlatt Act", I did not care to investigate what I heard about the Ottomans and their "caliphate", and I had no desire to associate with anyone who cried "Vande Mataram!" in the streets.

While the rest of India was engulfed in frustration and dismay, I was falling in love with the complexity and richness of my nation's cultural past. Though my father had robbed me of a sense of identity, he had gifted me the freedom and inquisitiveness needed to explore religion with levity and the absence of prejudice. At school, when we learned about the Guptas, and the Mauryans, and the Mughals, and the Marathas, my eyes would light up as I drew connections to everything I had read about Islam and Hinduism. Studying Hinduism, especially, leads to a never ending supply of lore, history, and tradition. I would ask my mother to help me seek out books

about the early Hindus, the Aryans, and the Jains. My interests carried me through the evolution of Vedic religion and, eventually, to contemporary sects and philosophies.

By the spring of 1919, I was beginning to give thought to caste. I had become aware of the contentious state of the subject, and the sectarian interpretations that had been born through greater reform efforts. The Indian national movement could not, it seemed, progress in the absence of parallel social reform. How could the lower varnas be motivated to fight against British imperialism if, in its place, the injustices of caste would continue to tread upon them? The names of Hindu movements—like the Brahmo Samaj and the Arya Samaj—began to surface in my studies. With more time, I think that I would have been naturally transformed into a revolutionary, with my interest in these Hindu reforms leading my way. However, the devastating turn of events that would upturn my life, also put a pause on my extracurricular curiosity.

I do not remember every detail of this horrific day. How could I? One does not live each day expecting it to be the most influential moment in their life. We do not memorise the details by the minute so that, when some world altering affair unfolds, they may be recalled decades in the future. I had been living a normal day, unsuspecting and oblivious to the unmatchable pain I would soon be burdened by. It was a Sunday so, I would guess, I had spent most of the day reading in my room. Unrest throughout the Punjab had picked up and, through my father, I had overheard that the Raj was expecting to need to crack down on the nationalists in order to prevent potentially violent uprisings. Of course, controlling the Punjabis—with our proud martial history—had become a top priority.

The charge was instigated by Gandhi. Early in the year, he and his followers had laid the groundwork for nation-wide satyagraha against some policy that had been dubbed the “Rowlatt

Act". Effectively, the act had been a continuation of the restrictions that had been warranted during the War; but, with the War over, these measures seemed strikingly brutal and needless. On 6 April, Gandhi's call for a hartal was met throughout the Punjab. Every shop in Amritsar was closed and, from what I had heard, this same protest was observed in cities across India. This was the kind of protest that even I could not help but be acutely aware of. The scale and success of the operation was shocking even to me—an Indian civilian for whom the nationalists acted—and so, it was not difficult for me to imagine how unsettled the Raj must have been.

The April of 1919 had many more demonstrations beyond the hartal. Many were peaceful, as Gandhi had ordered, and others were violent. The Raj's concerns were reflected in their odious treatment of the protesters and, in return, it was not uncommon for the protesters to match the escalated aggression. During that month, many protesters were killed in Amritsar, and even the English took a toll. It was the kind of suffering that my father had always wished could be avoided; the suffering that he used as an excuse to escape confrontation and danger. My mother, on the other hand, was undeterred.

By mid-April, Amritsar was under martial law. The Raj's General Dyer arrived in the city with a large company of armed soldiers. Assemblies became proscribed, the punishments that followed any serious crime against the Raj became cruel and indiscriminate, Dyer restricted the cities access to water and electricity, and a curfew was established; all measures that—to an oblivious and wealthy youth—are little more than an inconvenience. My parents, however, were far from oblivious. I saw both of them less by the day. My mother had been emphatically moved by this surge in oppression and, I suspect, was becoming more politically engaged than my father would have liked. From his perspective, I can only imagine, these developments must have been a tremendous headache. I rarely saw him at all, as he began to depart earlier for the court where

he worked many long nights. Indeed, all of these circumstances had begun to unsettle me; it was evident that some irreversible conflict was on the brink of unfolding. Nevertheless, I did my best to make use of the extra time and solitude.

If I say the date on which my life was forever changed, any Punjabi would immediately know of what I speak. It is a date that haunts the Punjab; a ghost which still terrorises our hearts. At the time, we were struck with disbelief; but I now look back with disgust at my foolish and naive self. Had we not learned of the ruthlessness of the Englishmen when they slaughtered, pillaged, and raped their way through Lucknow and Delhi in 1857? Perhaps we had grown accustomed to the "mercy" of the Raj since. I now believe that the English had been waiting, plotting, for the excuse to remind India of their authority. We had somehow convinced ourselves that the savagery of the East India Company had ended with the establishment of the British Raj; but we were woefully mistaken.

On the afternoon of 13 April 1919, I was in my room reading the Book of Exodus. It was now only a matter of months until I would be in London, learning about the profession of my father. I waited in great anticipation of the first adventure of my life. Though I had always enjoyed the way I used my time, I knew that my cloistered existence would never bear the same fruits as those offered on that foreign island across the world. My excitement overpowered any nervousness or reluctance that I could have felt. I was void of all concern.

If I had any talent in the arts, I could paint or draw for you a perfect replication of my father's face on that afternoon. In a word, he conveyed misery. It will never fail to amaze me; the range of experiences that the human soul must encounter. True joy is so marvellous, true anger is so palpable, and true despair is so heart wrenching because—no matter how many times in our lives we experience them; no matter how well they are described to us—we can not possibly

become familiar with such emotion. It is too rare, and too alien to normal life. Without fail, we forget how far the outer limits of *feeling* extend.

But, somehow, we can recognize these sensations in the faces of others. What was more painful for my father than the reality of what had happened, I think, was the responsibility of delivering, to his only son, the same evil pain. I rose to my feet and met him at my door; it had been immediately apparent that, whatever the reason for his despair, he was laden with a crushing burden. He could hardly look me in my eyes but, when our gazes did meet, I knew that I was in the presence of a broken—an obliterated—man. I am ashamed to admit that my first assumption was that he had come to tell me that I would not go to London. I imagined that he would tell me that he needed me to stay in Amritsar, or that he could not afford to send me away, or that for some reason I had been rejected by the university. How foolish I was—how petty and self-absorbed—to think, even for a moment, that such a trivial matter could possibly elicit the suffering that emanated from my his presence.

My father spoke in a weak, failing, voice. "They have opened fire at the Jallianwala Bagh. Your mother… she—I don't know where… We can't go there. They've blocked it off—"

"Where is mother?" I cut off my father, grasping him by his shoulders; but he could not speak with any clarity. "What do you mean they have opened fire? Where is she?"

"I don't…"

I had no patience. Whatever had happened, I feared that my mother was in danger. As I pushed past my father, he called my name in horror, begging for me to stay in the house; but I would not wait for him to regain his coherence. *Opened fire*, he had said; it was all I needed to hear to fear the worst. It appeared, as I stepped onto the streets, that whatever news my father had been rambling about had spread across the city. Men and women, the old and the young,

were sporadically emerging from their homes. They were all headed in the same direction—towards the Jallianwala Bagh garden—so I followed them.

The closer we ran to the Jallianwala Bagh, the more alarming our surroundings became. At first I heard cries from other people on the streets, and from within the homes I passed. Progressively, these wails of horror became combined with the disparaging and malicious roar of a great congregation ahead of me. A tumultuous mass had formed in front of the only entrance—and only exit—of the Jallianwala Bagh. Many people were running in the opposite direction of myself, some of whom appeared bloodied and wounded. The opening into the garden was blocked by a contingent of soldiers from the Indian Army; in their midst I saw some English officers, though many of the soldiers looked to be Gurkhas and Sikhs. The soldiers and the police were ordering us to turn back, firearms were threateningly waved in the air and pointed at the crowd. Those at the front of the mob were struck by the police's lathis and berated.

As I tried to make my way through the crowd, more police and soldiers began to arrive. There was an announcement that curfew had begun, and that we would be arrested if we failed to immediately return to our homes; but the masses only burst into further outrage. Warning shots were fired over our heads, and those closest to the authorities began to be roughly detained. As people around me fled the scene, I froze in indecision. I had never felt so powerless; I cried out for my mother, knowing that it was in vain. In groups, the soldiers took off in different directions through the city to corral us back indoors. Reluctantly, I was forced to return to my house. Defeated, my body shook in fear of what I knew in my heart but refused to admit.

I did not sleep that night. When I arrived home my father was not there. He came back only a few minutes after myself (he must have chased after me), and did not hesitate to wrap his arms around me like a vice. All he knew was that my mother had been in the Jallianwala Bagh to participate in an enormous, nonviolent, protest. There were thousands of protesters in the garden when General Dyer and his soldiers filed into, and blocked off, the only passage in or out. The word around the city was that, without warning nor provocation, Dyer had ordered the soldiers to open fire into the mass of unarmed civilians.

We awaited the morning with eyes wide and breaths shallow. I do not wish to go into much detail about the aftermath of this massacre. There is little I need to impart upon you besides that, when we arrived at the Jallianwala Bagh, among the hundreds—perhaps thousands—of bodies that laid in that disgusting tomb, was my mother's mutilated corpse. She had been shot in the shoulder; but this had not been the cause of her death. In the terrible panic, she and many of the other protesters had desperately searched for some place to hide from Dyer's onslaught. But in the Jallianwala Bagh, their only escape was a deep and dry well. Some of those who plunged themselves into this hole survived; others, like my mother, were crushed and broken, either from the initial impact or from the other bodies who were thrown on top of them. There was no way to tell how my mother had perished. Perhaps her death had been instantaneous. Or, perhaps she had been flattened by the desperation of the other victims, all whilst slowly bleeding out from her wound.

To me, the whole world had been scorched and only the ashes remained. Life was devoid of everything except the piercing sensation of loss. I could not comprehend this feeling—not because I had not expected my mother to mean so much to me—but because I believed that what I was then experiencing could not possibly be replicated. And yet, there were thousands of

innocent and unsuspecting families, all of whom had suffered this same crime. But what of beyond this massacre? How much agony had been wrought by the Raj, on a daily basis, all throughout this enormous subcontinent? It is simply too vast of a question to wrap one's mind around. Every day, more victims had their worlds obliterated, contorted, wholly demolished. It is beyond imagination.

I have found it to be almost pointless to afford much time talking about the following days of her murder. It seems as though, in this miserable land, it is rare to find anyone who has not experienced the same nightmare. If one was lucky enough to survive the Raj's reign of terror, fate has mercilessly caught up to them through the hands of their Indian brethren. In the Punjab—or here, in Jammu and Kashmir—none have escaped the bloodshed of Partition. We look at one another as though we are different species, as though there is nothing in the world that we could possibly share. But I have seen families of Hindu refugees—children, women—slaughtered in cold blood; I have seen trains stopped, their passengers murdered for claiming the wrong religion; I've witnessed gangs of Sikhs and Hindus terrorise Muslim minorities who were only guilty of having the misfortune of finding themselves on the wrong side of contrived and hastily decided border; I have killed Muslims in this war. How can we share nothing in common? The whole of India and Pakistan is united in grief.

It was obvious that I would not go to London. My future was uncertain, and my present stagnated. In my mourning, I no longer read nor wrote; not knowing whether to be angry or depressed, I isolated myself for many days, allowing these emotions to battle each other. I suppose this existence was not much different to my original reclusiveness. Only, it was far less productive, and exponentially more miserable.

As it turned out, for my father, my next steps had never been in question. For weeks, I had not spoken to him beyond that which was absolutely necessary. My mother's death had greatly exasperated the tension in my relationship with him. I could hardly face this man; he who now represented that which had led to her murder. For he had not renounced his office. My father, a slave to his politics, would do nothing to avenge my mother's death.

For all of his talk about the future of our people, about change and justice, my father never once lifted a finger to pursue these ends. The massacre at the Jallianwala Bagh had been an incarnation of evil itself; and yet, there would be no justice for the victims and their families. What about the British—these animals—could my father possibly envy or desire? What about these corrupt people could warrant our subservience? My mother had been martyred by her intolerance of our condition. It was because she believed in action, rather than conceding to our plight, that her life had been both fruitful and dangerous. I remember hearing about how the esteemed polymath, Rabindranath Tagore—who, not unlike Gandhi, I have always found to be lacking in urgency—renounced his knighthood in light of General Dyer's offence. My father shared neither the bravery of my mother, nor the self respect of Tagore, when—like a trained dog—he continued his work at court without hardly missing a beat.

For this pathetic excuse of a man, life carried on. It had felt, to me, as though the world itself had stopped spinning; like time had frozen when I saw my mother's lifeless body. I believed it to be unthinkable to move on from such a crime without retribution. At that moment, I knew that the fate of my entire life had been determined. I was prepared for every change; from then on, my every thought and action would be in pursuit of a righteous vengeance. But to my father, it seemed as though a change in course had not been even a passing thought. As if it had

been obvious, he explained to me that my departure to London would not be delayed. He would send me to live in the land of these inhuman monsters.

I suspect I would have protested harder if my father's decision had not left me so disgusted with the man himself. Even if I could have persuaded him against sending me away, it would mean that I would have to remain in the same city as this deplorable coward. What was more than this newfound aversion to my own father, was my dread of the daily reminders of my mother that would haunt me in Amritsar. My city, my family, and my youth had all been spoiled by the blood Dyer spilt. Still, I had not yet transformed into the intrepid revolutionary from the stories you have heard; and so—naive of the underground war being waged in the streets of every Indian city—I felt I had no choice but to accept my journey to the epicentre of the British Empire.

3

I wish I could say that London left no impression on me; that, under the weighty circumstances that characterised my life at the time, I had transcended petty and childish emotions. But I was in total awe of that unfamiliar land. I do not believe that any Indian could have travelled to London without being overcome by the same shock and wonder that was imbued in me. Though I had hoped to reject this new city—to protest this soulless society that had taken my mother—I was transfixed by my discovery of this new world, somehow on the same planet as my home, that was, in every way, alien to me. Beyond the change in climate, the foreign architecture, the strange customs, and the Western apparel, even the people carried themselves in a manner unlike that which I was familiar with. In London, everyone seems to have a purpose; the people on the streets are all *going somewheres* or *doing something* with an intensity and, almost, an urgency.

Truthfully, the speed at which London operated was admirable to me. Though I loathed the English—a spite that would never leave me—I noticed, too, that these Londoners were not so similar to the British in India. I certainly received my fair share of stares, odd looks, and remarks while abroad, but few of these people seemed nearly as invested or interested in the British Raj as you would expect from the perpetrators of an entire subcontinent's enslavement. In a way, this relative apathy was even more insulting to me; it was as though our suffering was incidental.

I am fortunate enough to say that, regardless of how foreign London was to me, I was spared from some of the discomforts and challenges that were faced by other Indian nationals. Though studying in England came at a tremendous cost for any Indian, my father supplemented

my stay much more substantially than many could afford. I was very thankful for these privileges, as one's experience in London is greatly dependent on their ability to enjoy the local customs and services.

The most immediate predicament that an Indian is likely to encounter in London is the absence of a vegetarian culture. Before her death, my mother, from whom I had received my aversion to meat-eating, had warned me of the temptations I would face to abandon my diet. It is not as though there were no meat-eaters in the Punjab, but the Hindus had long established a cultural infrastructure to enable healthy and convenient adherence to vegetarianism. Even after converting to Christianity, my father had remained a vegetarian because the diet was so easy and natural to uphold in India. In London, on the other hand, it became necessary for me to seek out venues that could satisfy my nutritional needs.

Like everything in London, the vegetarian restaurants were starkly distinguished from one another based on the wealth of those whom they catered to. On several occasions I dined at the more affordable restaurants (none of London's vegetarian options could compare to the cuisine of India), and I found that the greatest difference between these establishments were the social circles that patronised them. It was in the high end restaurants that I spent the most meaningful hours of my time in London, for these were the atmospheres which exposed me to the full scope of the city's intellectual culture.

At *The West Garden*, which had come to be my most frequented restaurant, I was initiated into the radically progressive side of the city. It was strange to me that a practice as common and normal to me as vegetarianism, in England, was a fringe and largely political culture. If I may separate my biases from my reflection on London—which, I admit, I take no pleasure in doing—I must say that there was an appreciable diversity in philosophical and

political thought. This diversity exists in India too, but in London—the seat of the great British Empire—it was a more worldly diversity; for the many acquaintances I made at *The West Garden* consisted of atheists, socialists, expatriates, immigrants, academics, and, in most cases, grossly affluent men and women.

At this point in time, Indians came to London almost exclusively as students, or to take the Indian Civil Service Exam. Compounded with the fact that many of us were vegetarian, and that usually the wealthy were the only ones who could afford the exorbitant costs of travel, I encountered and became familiar with many of the Indians in the city. Of all the people I met while in England, the most brilliant and upstanding man that I had the pleasure to acquaint myself with was not only a compatriot, but had also come from Amritsar.

The remarkable Bashir was a young Brahmin, about the same age as myself, who had come from our home city to take the Civil Service Exam. His family was far wealthier than mine, and their history became somewhat complicated when traced back to the Mughal Empire. Some of his ancestors had converted to Islam—though whether these conversions had been compelled by force was difficult to say—and, through marriages, his family had acquired some Muslim relatives. When I had met him, however, his immediate family had transitioned back to Hinduism; in fact, they had become rather orthodox in their faith. Nonetheless, he shared with me an openness and curiosity towards religions, and our many similarities gave us much to talk about.

I was originally tentative about his plans to join the Civil Service. Though significant strides had been taken since the Great War to increase the number of Indian Civil Servants, it was still universally known that the examinations were quite prejudiced against us. But still, Bashir maintained an admirable self confidence. His plan was to prepare for the exam while

studying at the University of London, and he would be in the city nearly as long as myself. We dined together at *The West Garden* most days, giving me abundant opportunities to investigate this hopefulness of his that I was incapable of emulating.

"Think about the Underground," he once told me. "Were you not taken aback when you first came here and saw it? I know that it did because it leaves all of us speechless. It is impossible to even dream of such a colossal feat in India. Could you imagine, in Amritsar, what it would take to engineer an entire system of stations and rails under our streets and homes? But here it has been done; not only has it been done, it has been done by the same people who would see it through in Amritsar. The government, alone, wields the tremendous power to deliver such miraculous services for the welfare of the people—it has a monopoly on the public good—and I am not eager to join those who have given up on the only institution with this immeasurable capacity. Of course they do not care about us; of course there is need for change; so I will hope to be the one who brings about that change."

But none of Bashir's friends and relatives had found themselves trapped in the Jallianwala Bagh, and I silently wondered—had he felt the same loss as me—if he would have harboured the same resentment that coated my heart. Regardless, his faith was not naive; before my stay in London, I doubt I had ever met a more intelligent man. Though it was apparent that he took his studies seriously, he was remarkably successful at balancing them with his personal enjoyment and cultural enrichment while in the city. I often attended the theatre and explored libraries and museums with Bashir (I always had time for my new friend, as I did not approach my studies with the same earnestness). Our sociableness and—more importantly—our recurring appearances at *The West Garden* earned us some attention among certain groups and, in time, we became friends with some of the politically inclined vegetarians of London.

Whereas vegetarianism in India is rooted in long held traditions and religion, it is most often adopted in London by those with a more anti-establishment oriented set of values. These sorts of people, who tended to be more progressive, also happened to be more likely to want to engage with Indians like ourselves. They were critical of the Raj, as they were critical of imperialism. To some of the people we engaged with, I think that Bashir and I were something of a novelty or spectacle. They had formed an identity for themselves that was centred around a political contrarianism, but they were among the elites of the society they liked to insult. They belonged to a philosophical movement that they could not possibly be invested in, for—whether their politics prevailed or floundered—they were insulated from discomfort and inconvenience. Of course, then, we were of great interest to them. Not only did we come from a culture where vegetarianism—which these progressives had adopted to manifest their aversion to the *status quo*—but we were also victims of the horrid system that they disparaged; summarily, we were evidence for their theories.

But this was not the character of every Londoner with whom we communed. As we spent more time at *The West Garden*, and among these progressive circles, Bashir and I grew close to two of the more genuine Londoners. Mr. Wood, a retired law professor, was especially warm to me when he learned of my studies. He was one of those particularly open and vulnerable kinds of old men, who, with age, abandon formalities and fear of judgement in exchange for concise and unguarded expression. Mr. Wood was close friends with the shrewd Mrs. Blair, who had spent ten years in Delhi with her husband who had held a high ranking position in the Civil Service. We certainly would not have become so familiar with Mrs. Blair had Mr. Wood not come to enjoy our company, as she was an especially reserved woman. However, I am quite thankful that

we did earn the approval of Mrs. Blair for, as cynical as she proved to be, she was a pragmatic intellectual who greatly influenced my own perspective on the Raj and its history.

The four of us would usually share a table when we found ourselves at *The West Garden* at the same time. By my second year in London, Gandhi's non-cooperation movement had gained serious traction, providing us with rich subjects to contemplate. I do not believe I have ever met—even in India—someone so emphatically enthusiastic about the non-cooperation movement as Mr. Wood was. His optimism starkly contrasted the positions of Bashir and myself which, in comparison, were lukewarm at best. We were obviously supportive of any movement against the Raj's tyranny; however, it was difficult to be anything but sceptical of the Indian people's capacity to elicit meaningful progress against the Raj, and Gandhi's seemingly soft approach was unconvincing.

For as often as they were together, Mr. Wood and Mrs. Blair's opinions on India could not have been further apart. Mrs. Blair clearly wanted what was best for our people, but she did not hide her absolute lack of faith in our pursuit of Swaraj. She contradicted nearly everything Mr. Wood said, and cast doubt upon any hope Bashir or I conveyed. Of course, from my personal experience, I was highly pessimistic regarding anything related to the Raj, but I could tell that Mrs. Blair's bluntness took a toll on the idealistic Bashir.

As draining as they could be, Mrs. Blair's comments were never unwelcomed. She was much older than Bashir and I, a similar age to Mr. Wood, and carried herself honourably. She was modest in both character and attire, always dressed in dull colours. Though many of the things she added to a conversation were contradictory to what someone else had said, she never went about delivering her point in a rude or belittling fashion. It was a valuable quality, as she had profound insight on the British Raj that Bashir and I eagerly lapped up.

One afternoon, as we awaited our meals at *The West Garden*, after reading more news about the progression of Gandhi's movement, Mr. Wood, Bashir, and I, questioned the best course of action for the Indian people.

"I must agree with the professor," said Bashir. "Debating whether or not Gandhi's methods are effective is, at the very least, a good sign. For if we were not asking these questions, it would mean that there was nothing *to* question. Regardless of the non-cooperation movement's legitimacy, it has the support of the masses; it is forward momentum."

"It is not forward momentum if we are just running in place," I replied. "The Raj strips us of our rights, imprisons our protestors, and hangs our patriots; and we respond with words and marches."

"If you are so hard set on immediate results, you will never be satisfied, Jathai," Mr. Wood countered. "Try to have some patience."

This was the natural progression of our conversations. Mr. Wood was fond of advising patience; but I often felt as though his incessant belief in justice was naive. It is easy to advocate for patience from the outside, sheltered from the blows that the patient are subjected too. I had little patience left; I was not won over by Gandhi and the pacifists who would prolong our suffering. Still, I recognized that the non-cooperation movement was a force to respect. If Gandhi's Congress could not defeat the Raj themselves, I believed that they could be a platform from which more proactive and driven nationalists might emerge.

But no method of protest was sufficient for Mrs. Blair. The three of us, combined, could not persuade her to have hope for India. Her experience in Delhi had left her calloused. Mr. Blair had been a champion of India's rights; his career had been dedicated to the progression towards

greater Indian representation. While Mrs. Blair had once shared her husband's enthusiasm, she had since been disillusioned by the iron grip of the Raj.

"Our young friend is partially correct," she remarked. "Gandhi and his followers are no threat to England, but neither are the young revolutionaries who take up arms and seek the immediate results you desire. But the Raj will continue to imprison the satyagrahis and their leaders. They will arrest Gandhi too, and Nehru and any other Congressman who stands their ground; and then they will release them, and arrest them again, and so on and so forth."

"But if the protesters are being arrested," said Bashir, "then they must be a threat to the Raj."

"Ah, you may be led to think so; but then these leaders will find themselves on the streets once again, and they will continue to preach their non-cooperation. The Raj could implement stricter sentences. They could even hang the protesters like they do the bomb throwers and assassins; but why combat the non-cooperation movement when the nationalists are too preoccupied bickering over the *means* to ever approach the *ends*."

I felt that there were flaws in her logic; of course the Raj could not indefinitely hold—let alone execute—the pacifists without risking open rebellion. And yet, Gandhi's radical commitment to nonviolence could never be reconciled with radicals on the other end of the political spectrum. As long as the satyagrahis held Congress, they would never join forces with the gun wielding freedom fighters; and as long as the non-cooperation movement denounced violence, it would alienate potential allies. I asked myself if I could initiate the compromise; if I could allow myself to be led by a man like Gandhi. Had my mother not died a proponent of satyagraha? But I could not stop myself from blaming this inaction for her death. I knew that my thirst for justice would not allow me to stay my hand; to turn the other cheek.

Mrs. Blair made us question everything we believed about our home. She portrayed the Raj as a puppet master, constantly tugging the strings of India's factions. Though she shared little about her husband, and rarely offered specific stories from her time in Delhi, there was an apparent bitterness to every word she spoke of India's government. I wanted to resist many of her claims, as she often dismissed the very foundation upon which my identity was built.

"India itself is a construct," she once told me, "designed by perverse and cunning architects. Its sole purpose is to divide the Empire's subjects."

"If the British wish to divide us, why would they organise us as one nation, one people, which we unite against them as?" I asked her.

"To blind you from your own truths. First they gave you the Indian Council to placate your desire for representation; but the Council has no say in the Raj's administration. Then they created the Indian National Congress for your leaders to direct their efforts; but the Congress does not reflect the will and needs of the common people. They opened the Civil Service Exam to Indians for your ambitious youth to aspire towards; but they strictly filter the applicants and are wary of giving away too much power.

"The sepoys of 1857 sealed the fate of their rebellion when they declared loyalty to the Mughal emperor. The people of India will never unite as Indians because they are Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, and Jains; they speak and write in Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, Sanskrit, countless local languages, and now even English. But as long as the Raj can convince you that you are one people, you will attempt to act as one, and you will continue to fail."

There was some truth behind the things Mrs. Blair would say, that much I could concede; but I did not allow her to dampen my resolve. I could not be deterred from fighting for my people's independence before I had even begun. Bashir, too, held strong. However, as his

examination drew near, the slightest hint of doubt pervaded his character. If he was rejected from the Civil Service, he feared that it would only affirm Mrs. Blair's claims, and that the hope he shared with Mr. Wood might implode.

My resounding belief in Bashir remained intact. I knew that there could not possibly be a better candidate, and that he had done everything in his power to strengthen his application. I could not compare my own studies to Bashir's, as I rarely made any effort to exceed expectations. I attended all of my law lectures, and read and wrote appropriately; but I did not expect the Bar examinations to be very difficult for me, and so my preparation took up little of my time. Truthfully, the time I spent with the English vegetarians and their friends proved to be far more enlightening than anything related to my legal education. Having been a law professor, Mr. Wood was a naturally beneficial friend to have. However, despite Mr. Wood's past career, it would be my conversations with Mrs. Blair that would reside in my mind for years to come.

As my final year in London was coming to end, I did not know how to feel. The flame of resentment still burned in my heart but, on the other side of the world, I was so distanced from my home that I was unsure of how I would proceed once I returned. However, my attention was first on Bashir, who would depart some months before me. He grew anxious as the days before his examination flew by. Mrs. Blair showed pity by not talking about the Civil Service; though, the sight of her produced a demonstrable nervous energy from Bashir.

When he had finally taken the examination, he was reassured. His confidence returned in full and I was thoroughly happy to see my friend once again breathe easy. The examinations had, according to Bashir, gone far smoother than he had imagined, and he now needed only to wait to hear back with—what he believed would be—his admission. While his results were pending, he had only free time, and I cleared my schedule as much as I could to spend his remaining weeks

together. The whole week before Bashir heard back from the Civil Service, our favourite theatre performed Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* every night; we attended each rendition.

"Like the virtuous Brutus," said Bashir, as we dined with Mr. Wood and Mrs. Blair, "in our return, Jathai and myself will be set against the tyranny of our Caesar."

"An imperfect metaphor, I think," I said. "For, unlike Brutus, I have no love for this Caesar; I have no reason to hesitate from delivering the final blow. Any other conspirator would be a better comparison, for me. Cassius, perhaps."

"These are dreary aspirations," said Mrs. Blair. "I would fear the prospect of being used as Brutus was. And to fail so spectacularly as the conspirators is unappealing, to me."

"I recall Caesar falling to their blades," responded Bashir. "Is that not successful enough?"

In her typically depressing manner, she answered, "There is not much value in killing Julius, if he is just to be replaced by Augustus: a Caesar for a Caesar."

I suppose we had deserved Mrs. Blair's cold take; one should not manipulate great art to fit their narrative. *Julius Caesar* is a tragedy and, from it, one should not attempt to derive a happy ending. Nevertheless, there was something romantic about Brutus' great sacrifice, and of Cassius' devastating fate. Whether or not Mrs. Blair was right about the futility of it all, I wished to participate in such a momentous conspiracy. If this, too, was Bashir's ambition, then he had placed himself on the right path. He would be within the very system he hoped to corrode; within the good graces of our Caesar. When the time came, Bashir—our Brutus—would know what virtue demanded.

But life does not always rhyme so perfectly. Sometimes, Caesar is wary of the Ides of March. One morning, I did not find Bashir at *The West Garden* for breakfast. At lunch, too, he

did not appear. It was not so unusual. Both of us would skip meals or eat at a different restaurant on occasion; but I knew that Bashir did not have any obligations at the time, and he had not informed me of his absence beforehand. At dinner, our English friends and I held off on ordering our meals, supposing that Bashir was simply running a bit late. It was not, afterall, difficult for us to pass time with colourful conversation. When nearly an hour had gone by, however, Mr. Wood reluctantly concluded that he would not show.

When Bashir missed breakfast the next morning, my suspicion evolved into concern. I took it upon myself to pay him a visit, to ensure his safety. When I arrived at his room, he did not answer my knocks or calls. The door, however, was not locked, and I gently entered. There, I was met with a sad sight; he did not react when he saw me, he only let out a shallow sigh. My friend was still wearing the same clothes that I had last seen him in, and looked ill in his posture and complexion. He was slouched in an armchair, his head in his right hand. I assumed that he had not eaten since the last dinner we shared.

You may have guessed the fate that had befallen upon poor Bashir. When I saw him in this state, I drew the same conclusion almost immediately. The previous morning, he had received news of his rejection from the Indian Civil Service. The astute Bashir, of whom I knew none that equated in competence and intellect, had been stripped of his future. My first response was anger—in fact, I never quite moved past this malice against the Civil Service—but I quickly made an effort to express only compassion for my dejected friend. For his health, I forced him to change his clothes and wash himself, and I dragged from his seclusion back to *The West Garden* to regain his energy.

I knew that he was grateful for my intolerance of his sulking, but for the rest of his time in London, Bashir never regenerated his former spirit. Though my confidence in Bashir had been

unwavering, I was—somehow—not overly surprised by his rejection. I think that a part of me had always expected such a cruel and corrupt decision. For all the faith I had in Bashir, I had none in the Raj. These were the tactics I had conditioned myself to expect; the kind of underhanded mockery of our humanity that, to me, defined our abusers.

Before Bashir left London, we promised each other to meet again in Amritsar. I assured him that, regardless of his rejection, we would serve our people in our return. Though appreciative of my attempts to encourage him, Bashir was unconvinced. He had, perhaps, begun to see some truth in Mrs. Blair's philosophies.

The very last thing that Bashir said to me, before his departure, was, "Powerless, I return to India."

With Bashir gone, any captivation I had for London dissipated. *Powerless*, he had called himself, but it was I who was a world away from my home. I then felt, more than I had at any point in my three years in London, as though I was not where I was supposed to be. Neither my lectures, nor the company of Mr. Wood and Mrs. Blair satisfied me any longer; for, in London, nothing I learned could be applied. I needed to return to Amritsar, where my purpose awaited me.

Though, for Bashir, everything had gone awry, I did not grow nervous as the date of my own examinations came closer. I had always known that I had taken the necessary steps of preparation; and, regardless, there was no part of me that was truly invested in the outcome. Indeed, I passed with flying colours, and my time in London was officially worthwhile. But I felt no reason to celebrate. Unlike Bashir, I had not come to that foreign land driven by passion and motivation. My only joy came from the thought that, with the end of my education, so too had my time in London concluded. I do not, now, regret those years; for, had I not embarked upon

that journey, I would not have met the cordial Mr. Wood, the sage Mrs. Blair, and—most importantly—the great Bashir.

My farewell to Mr. Wood and Mrs. Blair was unceremonious. I had no love for anything left in that city, and so my departure was made easy. Those three years were the only time in my life in which I wore Western clothing and, as I packed my few belongings, I left my new outfits behind. Boarding the ship that would take me home, I did not feel "powerless", as Bashir had. All the power in the world would have meant nothing to me, so long as I stayed in England. As London faded into the horizon, I felt closer to the land in which my actions might truly matter; in India, and only in India, did power mean anything to me. But power is not, I think, how Bashir imagined it; it has nothing to do with status nor position, but only with the ability to take action. And so, I anxiously awaited the sight of my home nation. I was prepared to act.

4

The heat of Amritsar is an oppressive force. When I returned from England in August of 1922, I was more acutely conscious of this brutality than ever before. The sun was our unspoken despot. In the clothes we wore, the energy we could exert, the smell of the air, and the extent of anyone's comfort, no one and nothing could transcend the total authority of the sun. In London, Bashir and I had learned to take many things for granted; but in Amritsar, ice was not a trivial matter, functionality superseded taste in choosing our attire, and there was no escape from the constant salt of our sweat. It took me some time to readjust to the weather that I had grown up in, and for the first week of my return I felt as though the vitality of my youth had been sapped down to the marrow of my bones. My father accommodated my weakness by allowing me to wallow in fatigue while our servants delivered my meals. The embarrassment I feel in describing this pitiful moment in my life is beyond words but, I suspect, the weather had not been the sole cause of this pathetic state.

Indeed, I had grown very accustomed to the English climate. The unpredictability of the London weather was balanced by its generally mild nature. I came to assume that it could rain at any moment, even when the sky was blue and the sun was shining. The winters were far colder than I had ever experienced in the Punjab, and you can certainly imagine the awe with which I was struck on the handful of occasions when it snowed. But, in my return, even these frigid winters seemed gentle in comparison to the sweltering summer months in Amritsar. There is a relentless quality to the hottest summers that makes rain, snow, wind, or any other discomfort seem inconsequential. Days passed and this heat did not yield. But, finally, after a full week of

my lethargy, I emerged from this self-imposed isolation with a new conviction. Re-tempered by the hammering sun of the Punjab, I knew that I would never wish to return to England again.

For the British climate is a force of oppression as well; it is a subtler, more insidious, kind of force. On the dreary days that the clouds block out the sun shine, you have no choice but to mirror the insipidness in your own disposition; when these clouds suddenly spout rain—drizzle or downpour—a damper is put on your mood without consent; if the wind decides to pick up, you are robbed of the warmth of joy and you may feel your skeleton shiver. There is no predicting these changes, and your natural right to an internal freedom is replaced by the ever-shifting whims of Great Britain. But this is the way of Britain, and this is the way of the British. They have conformed to this subtle and insidious force in every walk of life. I had come to this revelation gradually and unknowingly. I am not sure when it first began to develop within me—perhaps as soon as I stepped foot on English soil—but I know it did not reach its crescendo until I returned to Amritsar.

The resolute Bashir did not find similar difficulties in readjusting to life in Amritsar. He came to my home regularly, inquiring about my health and hoping that we would spend some time together. Indeed, when I had finally cast off my weakness, it was not long until I joined him in touring our home city. He behaved as though his misfortune in London had never occurred; his cheerfulness once again prevailed. For the next several days we would meet in the mornings and stroll through the city, observing every corner of Amritsar and drawing comparisons to the

world we had just spent our last three years in. I was surprised by how transformed Amritsar was in my eyes; it was not unfamiliar, but each sight bore new meaning.

For the Sikh, Amritsar is a truly holy city. To gaze upon the Golden Temple or the Khalsa College is to remind oneself that you are in the presence of the Sikh Empire's remnants.

"I very much prefer to stand in the place of a past empire," Bashir remarked. "It affords me the freedom to fantasise over former glory and might, while ignoring the cruelties and unflattering facets. In London, in the shadow of the real thing, one is acutely aware of the realities of imperialism. It is not so supportive of a romantic imagination."

"But, my dear Bashir," I replied, "we have not left the Empire's shadow."

If the shadow of the Empire loomed over Amritsar, then it is at the Jallianwala Bagh that it was darkest and coldest. It felt, to me, claustrophobic, though in reality it is quite an open and large location. Once a garden, the Jallianwala Bagh had become desolate and uninspiring. A well should represent a source of life and prosperity; but at the Jallianwala Bagh, you can only recall the stories of the horrified and defenceless victims, throwing themselves to its bottom, hoping to escape slaughter. My heart was engulfed by an unhealthy rage, but this was unsurprising. We felt compelled to pay our respects, but we did not linger in that tomb.

During these days, Bashir would incessantly draw attention to the great dilemma of caste. At first, I was less concerned about the subject than my friend; I now think that I had fallen victim to the expedient appeal of concession to a *status quo*. Growing up under certain social structures can make concepts seem palpable. The walls that, in my mind, defined and confined every aspect of Indian social life were as real and tangible as those which held the ceiling above my head at night. Walking through the streets of Amritsar, we witnessed the clear and ever-present effects of the varnas. In the bazaars there were many passers-by whom we could, with

only contextual and visual evidence, identify as Shudras and Vaishyas with much certainty. In the poorer districts of the city there were many obvious untouchables. By the temples and throughout the wealthier vicinities, there was no difficulty in spotting a Brahmin. Whenever the caste system reared its head, Bashir was stricken with remorse; but these same instances only strengthened the resolve of my attachment to the order and stability.

"I do not revel in the sight of poverty or misfortune," I told Bashir, "but surely you must see that there is some value to caste. The two of us have now had the luxury to have seen more of the world than most will ever will, and I would say that these injustices which you are so concerned with are quite universal. Perhaps caste did not exist in London, but we chose to dine at *The West Garden*, and not the cheaper establishments, for a reason. Is it not better that we have taken ownership of these disparities and are not so cowardly as to avoid the subject altogether? I should say that caste is preferable to British dishonesty—question a European about class and they will recoil behind their prejudices and economic theories, like shields, but not dare to consider their realities and implications."

"But how has India confronted class with any less ambiguity than the Europeans?" Bashir countered. "Can you tell me, Jathai, to which varna you belong?"

"My family are Brahmins."

"Your father is a Christian."

"But he was born a Brahmin."

"Ah, so from the womb he taught the scripture of Hinduism?"

"Of course not," Bashir's line of questioning had caught me off guard.

"Then how could he have been *born* a Brahmin?"

"I do not profess to understand every intricacy of caste, Bashir."

"Then you rule yourself out, it seems, from being a Brahmin. For a true Brahmin should hold every detail of the Vedas in his heart." Upon seeing my growing confusion, Bashir elaborated, "I do not mean to give you a hard time, my dear Jathai, but I do not think that caste is so useful, for us, as it may appear. To you, caste represents a simplification of class struggle but, to me, caste is a simplified target to which we may direct our aim."

Bashir and I shared a love for history—a love which I had developed in London—and, in these times, an Indian student of history was a student of revolution. We were admirers of the Americans and the French, and we eagerly consumed any news that we could about the Bolsheviks. In religion, of course, I was well versed. I was quite familiar with Vedas, the Upanishads, many of the Puranas, the Bible, and even the Quran. But Bashir was now going beyond my fascination with knowledge, displaying a partiality towards application and initiative.

As we approached the end of our tour of Amritsar, Bashir urged me to accompany him to one last location. I was unsure of where my friend was so set on taking me, but I followed him nonetheless. We were not in a particularly wealthy section of the city when we came upon a gate. All across its top, and down its sides, the gate was covered in Hindi script, and only a brief glance was needed to know that we were about to enter a temple.

My religious identity was long ambiguous and undefined. My Christian education had culturally displaced me, for my father's avoidance of forcing his religion upon me was not enough to off balance the lack of a Hindu household. For most of my youth, if my personal faith was brought up for any reason, I would default to identifying as a Hindu. This was not a complete lie, but it was also predominantly for convenience. After so many times, you see, explaining one's peculiar upbringing becomes tiresome, and being the son of a converted Christian was a subject that drew no shortage of intrigue. I quickly learned, however, that such

convenience was dependent on my ability to genuinely pass as a Hindu, even if I could not come across as exceptionally devout. As Bashir and I entered the temple (an underwhelming temple at that), even I—with my strange position on faith—was keenly aware of the growing influence of the particular movement to which the establishment belonged: Bashir had brought me to the Arya Samaj.

The inside of the temple was not a spectacular site; there were no shrines or elaborate decorations, and I was quite sure that the building had not been constructed with the intent of being a place of worship. I would later learn that this particular temple held additional roles, one of which was being a school for Vedic knowledge. My attention was drawn more to the people I saw than any aspect of the building itself; there was a small group in a far corner of the room, gathered around two obscured men who seemed to be having some form of debate. Much of the clothing also caught my eye, as it appeared to reflect a broad range of wealth. My first impressions, based upon appearances, dispositions, attitudes, and anything my ears could pick up, were not of the radical fanaticism which I had—for whatever reason—envisioned the Arya Samaj to be. Truthfully, I could not place my finger upon what these people made me feel, or the energy which the building seemed to exert. But during my early days at the Arya Samaj—for I could not help but return to the enthralling temple—I discovered the spirit of this movement to be indescribably bold and righteous.

We had taken several steps into the temple, and I had lost awareness of my surroundings. In some strange paradox, the simplicity of the interior had made it more difficult for me to comprehend what I was seeing. It was like attempting to decipher some nonsensical work of art after being told that it was a depiction of some specific scene or person. For I knew that I had entered the Arya Samaj—at least this is what I had been led to believe from the outside—but

who were these people? What were they saying? Why was the temple so oddly desolate? They defied every expectation I had of a radical Hindu faction.

In my perplexion I did not notice that we had been joined from behind. “Ah, Bashir,” the stranger softly said, “is this the friend you have told me about?”

I have never seen Bashir show such respect to another person as he did to this man. The man, who Bashir only ever addressed as “Swamiji”, was a devoted ascetic. Frail is the best way to describe how Swamiji appeared; he was incredibly old, entirely bald, and thinner than what most would consider healthy. He only ever wore the same saffron dhoti, and his short stature and pleasant demeanour gave him an unassuming and welcoming image.

Bashir introduced us, and for a fairly long time Swamiji asked me questions about my upbringing, as well as my understanding of the Vedas. He only absorbed my answers, showing only interest and making no attempts to impart persuasion of his own. He was genuinely fascinated by my childhood, and of my relationship with religion. After he had asked many questions about my studies and family life, we followed the old man on a tour of the temple; though, I quickly realised that “temple” was not a wholly accurate description of the establishment. As Swamiji led us towards another room—there were more rooms than the small exterior of the building had led me to believe—we passed the small gathering that seemed to be intently listening to the conversation of two men. One of these men—who, by every metric, was quite unforgettable—noticed us and our gazes met. He was easily the tallest man in the room, and looked to be strong and athletic. His hair was cut short and he had an impressive moustache. At this moment, the other man was speaking, but I was so transfixed on the tall gentleman that I took no notice of what they were discussing.

Through a doorway, we entered a larger room with blankets and pillows laid in rows all across the floor. Swamiji explained that the room was used to house volunteers who helped run the Samaj, but also the impoverished. Anyone who came to the Arya Samaj in need was set on a path for self improvement and, as it was early afternoon at the time, all of the residents were out searching for jobs, working, volunteering, or studying. In exchange for its charity, the Arya Samaj only demanded adherence to its rules and principles. Swamiji told me that his students and residents were required to follow the tenets of Arya Samaj, but he did not go into much further detail at the time. Instead, he showed me the remaining rooms, which included an unimpressive kitchen—where they provided free meals—and a library-like storage room. There were a great many books and pamphlets, most of which were religious in nature, but there were also historical and political works. From one of the shelves, Swamiji procured a rather sizable book and handed it to me. It was written in Hindi and titled *Satyarth Prakash*, by Dayanand Saraswati.

"Take this," he told me, "and when you have questions, return with them."

And that was it. He had peddled nothing to me, he had not judged my life nor my faith, he had not made any suggestions or recommendations; he had told me nothing, and showed me everything.

Before departing, I turned to Swamiji and asked, "What is the purpose? Your purpose—that of Arya Samaj?"

"We see the injustice," he replied, "the injustice and the oppression of India. And through Truth, we pursue reform."

I did not wait very long to begin reading the copy of *Satyarth Prakash*. When I returned home that evening, I asked my father what he knew about the Arya Samaj. There was an odd look in his eye—one of suspicion, perhaps—but he did not question the motivations for my interest.

"Well," his response came after a moment of thought, "many of them are a fairly nationalist lot, and I suppose they have some things in common with the Abrahamic religions."

"Like what?" I inquired.

"It is a monotheistic sect, which is certainly abnormal for Hindus. But they base their conviction on the complete infallibility of the Vedas, and reject many other Hindus as idol-worshippers. It is a somewhat young movement, but they have already acquired a great deal of influence and achieved many things."

"What have they achieved?" I asked with some impatience, which I could tell my father had picked up on.

"They are quite set upon what they seem to view as a sort of rectification of India. In many respects they are reformers; they have conducted much campaigning against caste and child marriages, among other things. Although, they have been met with a good amount of opposition as well—especially in the Punjab. The Arya Samaj is a bit unique, you see, in that they make an effort at conversion. I suppose it is off putting to some Hindus. They have converted a good deal of Muslims; they specifically look for families that they believe were forced to renounce Hinduism under the Mughals." Everything that he had told me had only further drawn my interest to the Arya Samaj, and made me more eager to read the book. I abruptly turned away from my father and set off to begin reading in private, but just before I had

left his presence he said, “They do not appear to be opposed to converting Christians either, I would add.”

I have been well acquainted with many exceptional men, and have always known my place. I was always a good student, and would consider myself to be an intelligent man. Generally, however, I have avoided being tempted into overconfidence or pretentiousness. Of all my strengths—which I do not wish to discredit—I believe that reading has been the single area in which I have displayed notable aptitude. At this point in my life I was well educated in writing and language, and I had become comfortable with reading and writing in Hindi, Urdu, Sanskrit, Punjabi, and English. When I finally sat down that afternoon to read the long *Satyarth Prakash*, I knew that I had opened the most important book of my life. I was fully engaged with Dayanand Saraswati’s words and—despite the considerable length—I made an effort to complete the book with haste.

Indeed, *Satyarth Prakash* made me feel like a fool. Everything I had felt about India was confirmed by these words, but Dayanand Saraswati filtered the facts of life through a wholly disparate lens than that of my own; and through this lens he derived profound conclusions. Bashir, too, must have thought me to be a fool, for it was not a week after I had challenged his beliefs about caste that I had adopted them in their entirety. Saraswati put forth the foundations of the Arya Samaj with a clarity and commitment to Truth that left no room for objection. Each page was a call to action; he demanded dissatisfaction in the face of injustice. The book that I held exposed the degradation of Hinduism, and dismantled the institutions of India (*Aryavarta*, he called this destined land). The forces that oppress *Aryavarta*, these unmasked and assertive injustices, I have come to see as a true gift; for they have united us against unmistakable enemies.

I suppose my life would have gone a very different direction had it not been for the charity of my father. I spent many of the next days at the Arya Samaj learning more about its movements and the Vedas, while my father provided me with a generous allowance and little pressure to actually make use of my years in England. He was mostly satisfied with my occasional clerical assistance, recognizing the experience his own position could indirectly provide for me. I became aware of most of the important news that circulated through the Amritsar court system as well as any rumours—all of which I would have found very gripping if my attention had not been preoccupied with the Arya Samaj. There is an all-consuming quality of associating with history. That temple was my doorway to history. It was an opportunity to participate in true progress.

Not long after I began regularly visiting the Samaj, I once again witnessed a small congregation around what appeared to be some kind of discussion. This time, Bashir and I joined the others, and I could see that one of the men in the centre was, yet again, the tall moustached man.

"The tall one is Indra," Bashir whispered in my ear. "He comes here occasionally and offers his services. The other is a friend of his, Sachindranath, who follows the Samaj."

This information surprised me, as I assumed that Bashir had implied that Indra was not actually a member of the Arya Samaj. Fascinated, I listened intently in hopes of learning more about the imposing man.

"Yet another example of the power of India's lower classes!" he exclaimed. "To me, the masses represent a great untapped potential, for the Raj can only stomach so many of these revolts before they are forced to make concessions—history has proven this. First, we make the Raj unprofitable—the Swadeshi movement has made great progress in this, as you can attest, my

friend—and then we make the Raj unconscionable. So, yes! These rebels in Malabar have performed a great service to India! Their 'failure', as some say, is only a failure when removed from the context of our greater struggle."

"I am only hesitant," Sachindranath replied, "to potentially compromise essential principles by endorsing such revolts as that in Malabar. It was not the British who shouldered the burden, but the Hindus."

"The Hindu elites, whose power was gifted to them by the Raj."

"Certainly, but Indian independence will come only from an *Indian* movement. It is not Muslim independence, nor Hindu independence, nor Sikh independence that I dream of, but *Indian* independence. The British know that, divided, we are weak, and have done well to exploit this weakness. As far as I am concerned, the Malabar rebellion has propelled our cause no more than the Revolt of 1857."

"Ah, but we already know that we disagree on '57 as well, my friend," Indra said, as his moustache was lifted by a great smile. "These principles of yours, Sachindranath, your ideas and schemes, these are the backbone of revolution; but the bomb and the pistol are its manifestation. My friends, the sacrifice of a revolutionary can never be in vain! And so, the Moplahs at Malabar have not been defeated for nothing. Debate strengthens our resolve and refines our methods; but when the enemy is undisputed, let us not hesitate to act!"

"I wonder how the enemy can be undisputed," said Sachindranath, "when the factions of India seem to be at odds in every conflict. In Malabar, the Moplahs were at the throats of the Hindus. And in 1857, did the Sikhs and Gurkhas not play a role in quelling the sepoys? Where were the Punjabis, the Bengalis, or any of the southern states when these mutineers took up arms? India did not come to her own aid. And how could we have been expected to join the

rebels when they declared loyalty to the Mughals? No, I am not wholly convinced that our plight is as well defined as you have presented it."

What shocked me about their dialogue was, what I inferred to be, an unspoken acceptance of violence. Indra's "bomb and pistol" excited me, as did his enthralling charisma. How would my father react to these appeals to lawlessness? How would my mother? My own family proved Sachindranath right; beyond the diversity of cultures, India's people are disjointed in politics and philosophy. Even in their rejection of violence, my parents would not have agreed. My father's commitment was to the law, whereas my mother's was to Truth and the nonviolence of satyagraha.

I then came to a new revelation: that every nuance I could identify traced back to a common influence. In his commitment to law—the law of the Raj—my father received the privileges of comfort and prestige. His conformity was encouraged and rewarded. But what of my mother? She had been a devoted advocate of nonviolence, a pacifist at heart. Her reward had been the firing line. Nevertheless, the victims of Jallianwala Bagh had not been silenced, but martyred. No doubt, many of the bombs slung, and pistols drawn, following 13 April 1919, were motivated by the senseless murders of that fateful day. And the peaceful activists, I am sure, used the massacre to bolster their own will and courage. Even to the conformists, the massacre at the Jallianwala Bagh must have been affirmative, as it put on display the folly of crossing the British. Sachindranath's words were rhyming with those of Mrs. Blair.

I was overcome by the energy which I had only ever been exposed to in the Arya Samaj. There is something about an institution that has been constructed on a foundation of real initiative—something about being surrounded by inspired and noble peers—that emboldens and guides the soul.

“But our enemy is as clear as day,” I interjected, with a sure voice. Everyone turned to me, but Indra’s expression somehow guarded me from any embarrassment.

“How so?” he asked me, with a smirk and an encouraging tone.

“In all of India’s internal conflict, it is only the British who prosper. We can never hope to reform our own society if we ignore its disease and address only its synptoms.”

“Our comrade, Jathai, has struck at the heart of this conundrum!” I was unsure how Indra had known my name. “And we arrive, again, at my strongest conviction. Every act against the Empire is of value to our cause. Every moment we waste contemplating who our allies and enemies are, represents a potential loss of ground against the Raj. We need not be united by homogeneity, for we are already united in cause.”

This debate continued for some time, though Indra’s points were never resisted with much passion. Sachindranath, I thought, was very much in agreement with his counterpart, only ever asserting his voice to offer new perspectives or words of caution. When the discussion winded down and people began to disperse, Bashir told me to stay behind with him so that he could introduce me to Indra. Sachindranath remained as well. Indra’s demeanour was no different than it had been with the small audience. He possessed so much warmth and zeal that I needed little convincing to know that he was a natural leader.

“What would you say,” he asked me, “if I offered you the ability to take action? Action, against the Raj, and against injustice.”

“Without second thought,” I replied, “I would accept.”

“Good. Bashir? The next time you come to Moolmati’s, bring Jathai. We are never not in need of another revolutionary.”

5

On the very outskirts of Amritsar, there was a small and innocuous clothing repair shop. The inside of this little establishment was filled with stacks of various textiles and garments, all solely managed by an old woman. She would spend nearly the entirety of every day sitting at the very back of her shop, behind her wide table. Moolmati was her name and—though she was compact and shrivelled in age—she emanated an intimidating presence. Moolmati's shop was a substantial distance away from any of the bazaars, and one might question how it acquired any business. Indeed, its income is based on a tiny and consistent set of customers. It was highly unusual for an unfamiliar face to walk through her shop's doorway, but I think there is something to be said about loyal clientele.

By this time, there was much support for the boycotting of British goods, but I always felt that this Swadeshi Movement was oriented with its effects on the British—as opposed to Indians—holding priority. I suspect that these tactics produced demonstrable ramifications for some British exporters, but I had personally been more attracted to the good that they do for local businesses. A few loyal customers could be quite favourable, if one considers the industries that had been all but obliterated or outsourced by the greed of imperialism.

Take, for example, the leather workers, who—in our Hindu-dominated society—never really stood a chance. Their business relied on a niche market, and attracted much condemnation from even the least devout Hindu. With the introduction of British goods, the leather industry floundered, for the trains and motor vehicles had nudged into the lane of leather (who needs a leather saddle, when the steel trains are faster than the horse). No one cares for the leather

worker, and even this slight nudge was enough to bring about dire consequences. And so, a few loyal customers were preferable to many reluctant clients.

But Moolmati's situation was not as simple as it appeared, and I am not entirely sure that her business would have stayed afloat had it not been for the secrets that she kept. Behind this old woman's table was a locked door. Behind this door was a staircase; and at the bottom of this staircase, there was a basement. This basement was roughly the same size as the floor above it, and was separated into two rooms; the staircase led to the much larger of these rooms, in which another door led to the second room which offered access to an additional set of stairs. At the top of these stairs was a cellar door, which led to the outside of the shop. Moolmati's basement stored a great variety of items, none of which were related to textiles, and most of which were extremely illicit.

The first time I descended into Moolmati's basement was my first exposure to the revolution. Whatever possessed me in the Arya Samaj could not be found in that basement. It is harder to find the romance of revolution when you are actually in the midst of the thing. The Arya Samaj was for talk and ideas; but it is difficult to fantasise about abstract theories when a bomb is being constructed only an arms length away. I was no longer just a nationalist; I was now a criminal, a rebel, a dacoit. Frankly, the surrealness of it all was off putting, and most people lack the constitution to embark upon the journey which we underwent without reluctance or hesitation. They do not have the courage; they are without the guts needed to acknowledge the work that it takes to achieve the future they envision. This work involves many things that secure you a cell in a prison, or a rope around your neck. Under that innocent clothing repair shop, the tools for this kind of work could be found; and the tools for this kind of work are weapons.

It is worth clarifying that many of the weapons of a revolutionary can be surprising to the inexperienced. There are, of course, the pistols, long guns, swords, knives, bombs, and ammunition that you might expect. These are indispensable, for without them there is no teeth nor pressure to the revolutionary's threats and demands. These would excite the young nationalists, who were drawn to notions of action and adventure. I think that many people joined our struggle with hopes of emulating the stories they had heard of Bhagat Singh, Chandra Azad, and Ram Prasad Bismil, whose stories have been carried along and revered. If I was to make an educated guess, however, I think that a look into the lives of these heroes would unveil a rather mundane and ungratifying day-to-day existence.

The most important weapons of a revolutionary, you see, are pen and paper. If you have imagined the life of a revolutionary as involving daring robberies and thrilling stand-offs—regardless of the movement they belong to—take a moment to consider the funds needed to acquire the resources, the markets through which these funds can be spent, and the preparation needed to finally enact these schemes. The practical solution is to kill two birds with one stone: find a way to acquire funds and take action at the same time. Thus, littered amongst the firearms and blades in Moolmati's basement, there were stacks of pages, pamphlets, books, and letters. It was a library of slanderous, disparaging, patriotic, and nationalist propaganda and correspondence. The engine of revolution is fueled by ink.

I, like most, had not foreseen the importance of writing to the nationalist movement. The day after my introduction to Indra at the Arya Samaj, I had accompanied Bashir to Moolmati's shop. Here, I became more properly familiar with the mysterious Indra and his affairs. It seemed as though he had extended his full trust to me without reservation. Undoubtedly, Bashir had spoken about me before I had even joined the Samaj; otherwise, these revolutionaries simply

behaved with recklessness. Regardless of how assuring Bashir's words must have been, I could tell that Sachindranath took issue with my hasty integration. Though he did not allow these thoughts to affect his interactions with me, he did not care if I was aware of his reservations.

In all honesty, I think that I would have sided with Sachindranath had I been in his shoes. Though Indra was the definitive leader of our organisation—the Indian Freedom Association, as we called ourselves—Sachindranath was its orchestrator. He was around the same age as Indra, both being in their early thirties, though he much smaller and less imposing; but what he lacked in authority, he made up for in experience and wit. Sachindranath had been born and raised in Bengal, with his first exposure to revolution being during the backlash against the province's partition. When Lord Curzon divided Bengal from the rest of India in 1905, the Bengali response resulted in what became—in my opinion—the height of the revolution. Should you ever need an example of true courage in the face of adversity, of nationalism and responsibility, of selfless sacrifice and honour, I would direct your attention to Bengal.

The Bengalis were the champions of the Swadeshi Movement. Never has India delivered a greater blow to the English coffers than it did through the Bengali-led boycotts, and the success of this movement must be attributed—in no small part—to the revolutionary groups that emerged around the turn of the century. At the forefront of these groups, and to whom Sachindranath's allegiance previously belonged, was Anushilan Samiti. If the Samiti and the Indian Freedom Association were to be directly compared and contrasted, I must admit that I would be a bit embarrassed to have affiliated with the latter group. Anushilan Samiti possessed a structure, a stability, and an efficiency which the dreamers of the IFA never rose to. Nevertheless, Sachindranath had been so enamoured by Indra's charisma, that he had

permanently relocated to Amritsar with hopes of lending himself to the growing revolutionary groups of the Punjab.

To Amritsar, Sachindranath brought an affinity for language and the pen. Before his arrival, the IFA had been starved of resources in every category; save morale, which Indra could perpetually and effortlessly proliferate. At Indra's side, Sachindranath took to writing and dramatically increased the output of the Association's literary production. The Bengali could translate from German, French, and Russian, and so the IFA's capacity for the distribution of prohibited works became less restricted by previous language barriers. Indra made arrangements to acquire a plethora of European treatises, manifestos, essays, and various mediums regarding philosophy, socialism, revolution, nationalism, and many other topics which he could sell and disperse throughout his connections in the major cities of India for the purposes of agitation, recruitment, and—perhaps to a more significant degree—funding.

But Sachindranath's translations were not of much interest to me. Translation is an uninspired and tedious affair. Even I could lend myself to the IFA's translating exploits (though, with much greater limitations to those of Sachindranath) with little effort. What the Bengali brilliantly contributed to revolutionaries of the Punjab was best manifested within his original works. Unlike Indra, who would directly tackle the politics of India, unmasked and with a heavy hand, Sachindranath rarely touched prose, if it could be helped, and garnished the IFA's catalogue with odes to the abstract. He would write about countless emotions and ideas, most overlapping, and all providing their reader with the same encouragement and drive to defend what can only be described as beauty. He wrote about death, life, nature, past, present, future, youth, love; Sachindranath did not attack the Raj nor explore the frictions of opinion. And

somehow, these poems were always, to me, the most political works produced by any Indian revolutionary.

It was always Aryavarta, "Land of the Aryans", in Sachindranath's writing. His perception of India, or of what India was destined to be, was not in question. If you could read his poetry, you would not be likely to remember any particular line even an hour later, but you could recall the emotions that the words had evoked as though Sachindranath was personally rereading them into your ear. You can take any idea—an object, a feeling, a concept, a place—and present it so cleanly and unflawed that one will never find satisfaction with the imperfections of the idea's place in the real world. There are no limitations to how pristine, how scenic and tranquil an undisturbed lake can be. So long as this is the writer's lake. For the world's lake is rippled by the wind, mixed with mud and algae, filled with leeches and mosquitoes; it can be undrinkable and home to the perils of nature. But Sachindranath distracted his reader from the world and, instead, drew their attention to the writer's dream. For anyone with a sense of humanity would be willing to make sacrifices for a chance to achieve a world in which the pen's fictional serenity rang true; but no one wishes to lend themselves to the ugliness of reality.

Sachindranath filled me, and so many others, with dreams of justice and progress. Now, I do not think he believed in the verses he peddled. Looking back on my relationship with Sachindranath, without undue contempt or judgement, I can only label him what he was: a liar. Perhaps a liar is what we needed; for who would so readily plunge themselves into the long and dark tunnel of war without some assurance that they would find light at the other end? And maybe there was a light at the end of our struggle but, if there was, it was a candle to Sachindranath's sun. I admired him; he was an intentional and prescient man. But I never really knew him.

The IFA was a notably diverse organisation, and Sachindranath was not the only Bengali to regularly appear at Moolmati's. In total, there were around a dozen Bengalis who I would come to recognize, one of which was a young boy named Narendranath. Young Naren—who was no older than thirteen when I joined the IFA—was an orphan from early on in his childhood. He lived with and was taken care of by the other Bengalis, often residing in the homes of different revolutionaries and occasionally under the roof of the Arya Samaj. The boy had a habit of taunting and provoking any Englishmen who passed by, only to disappear into a crowd or through some winding streets if ever given chase. I have little else to say about Naren, for he was quite impressionable and harboured few serious opinions for any considerable length of time; but he supplied us with a vitality and an optimism which none took for granted.

Most of the IFA was Punjabi. Though the majority of the Association was Hindu, there were many Punjabi Muslims as well, and we had many connections with Muslim revolutionaries in a number of distant locations and professions. The most prominent of the Muslims in the IFA was Mohan, a rather senior member of the Association. Mohan was, perhaps, the only other man who could match the passion and magnetism of Indra. Whereas Indra's energy seemed to be derived from a radical nationalism, however, Mohan drew his zeal from a religious righteousness which neither wavered nor compromised. Even besides his admirable adherence to his religious tenets—which, in my experience, all faithful Muslims embody with a resolve which I have long envied—Mohan's philosophical and political positions were characterised by narrowness and presented as infallible.

The positions which Mohan was most passionate about were not entirely predictable, and this absence of an identifiable pattern to his passion made paying attention to him quite entertaining. At any moment, one could casually make a claim or speak a phrase that elicited an

intense response from our friend. I came to make mental notes of specific topics that were guaranteed to animate him. Given the politically active and debate-centric nature of the IFA, some of these topics would incidentally come up with some frequency, and some were unavoidable altogether. The phrase "Anglo-Indian" was one of these triggers; Mohan was observably repulsed by its very utterance.

"*Anglo-Indian*!" he would cry. "What could possibly be the meaning of this term? In all meaningful ways, 'Anglo' and 'Indian' are wholly irreconcilable words! How can I be wrong when the needs and desires of the Indian and English people, the Indian and English nations, their leaders, their histories, their futures, their industries and their interests, have always been, and always will be, at odds?"

Mohan would vehemently reject any suggestion of cooperation or collaboration with the English. If Parliament and the Raj implemented policies which seemed to objectively benefit the Indian people, Mohan would have no difficulty in finding a basis for criticism and opposition. A couple of weeks into my involvement with the IFA, Mohan was delivering one of his tirades against the "Anglo-Indian" concept. I still tend to think that Mohan himself attributed, to this term, the significance which he also attacked. Perhaps he was just looking for excuses to slander the Raj. Sachindranath had brought up the construction of universities in India under English rule, positing that they were an example of good that had come from Anglo-Indian relations. To Mohan, however, these universities were nothing more than an insult and a scheme; an extension of the antithetical relationship between the "Anglo" and the "Indian".

"The English universities are institutions designed to erode the values of this nation," he professed. "Those who attend them are not exposed to knowledge or truth, but to an *English knowledge* and an *English truth*. The Brahmins and affluent who depart for London to acquire

education and perspective have not only been indoctrinated into believing that the Europeans possess some quality that we do not have, but that they possess something which the people of India *cannot* have! Any belief that would assume that we are an inadequate people is mistaken. It has been confused by the incompatibility of the Englishman and the Indian. But I implore you to see that this incompatibility is no product of an Indian deficiency, but of the inherent and unmistakable opposition of the two cultures and their wills! If you hear the word—*Anglo-Indian*—know that its speaker refers to an oxymoron, for nothing that is Indian can be anything but entirely opposed to the English!"

Setting aside the obvious issue I took with Mohan's innate prejudice against English-educated Indians, I had always found his incessant hatred of the term, "Anglo-Indian", to be amusingly ironic. I was not opposed to his belief, per se, but could not help but feel as though his logic was inconsistent in context with his other views. As I have said, the nature of the IFA makes it all but impossible to avoid regularly discussing certain topics; and one subject that never failed to come up was the All-Muslim India League. Now, for someone who visually cringed at the sound of "Anglo-Indian", I had always felt that he should have rejected the name of the "All-India Muslim League" with a similar vigour.

Mohan was, like many Muslims at this time—though not so many as we would see in the following decades, and certainly not as many as there are today—a follower of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's general philosophy on Indian religion. In Mohan's mind, there was no possible future in which the Hindu and the Muslim could share a government. In retrospect, I suppose you could call Mohan ahead of his time, for he was a staunch partitionist before it was popular. Indeed, I do not think that Jinnah himself was as hard-set upon partition as early as the spirited Mohan.

Mohan had worked hand-in-hand with Indra even before the arrival of Sachindranath, and it was through their cooperation that the IFA found success in uniting the feuding communities of Amritsar. Indra had found favour amongst the Arya Samaj, and Mohan had worked tirelessly to recruit and assuage the concerns of the Muslims. Sachindranath's influence practically nullified any friction between the Punjabis and the Bengalis; but what was most impressive was the IFA's Sikh membership. Though less pronounced than the engagement of the Hindus and Muslims, operating in the holiest city of Sikhism ultimately demands some Sikh assistance.

Our Sikh comrades were as invaluable as they were unreadable. The most active Sikh in the IFA was Gupteshwar, who was hardly ever seen without his two closest friends: Kapil and Jagdev. They frequently alluded to some underground Khalsa Army— which intrigued me, but did not quite persuade me—and that they were in collaboration with this secret organisation. Of course, having grown up in Amritsar myself, I knew that the British had rather thoroughly battered and dismantled the Sikh Empire; but how useful this army would have been to our cause! I entertained their bluffs, though I never wholly understood their purpose. Perhaps they had wanted to exaggerate their value—and therefore their authority—or maybe they, like myself, simply relished the comfort of a reassuring fantasy.

Nevertheless, the Sikhs had very real connections with very real worth. The strength of a successful revolutionary organisation is not found in its numbers, but in its relationships. In fact, there is incentive to avoid over-recruitment, as you do not want to draw unnecessary attention, or manufacture unnecessary risks. Therefore, it is better to limit membership to a handful of useful and well-connected individuals. Our Sikh comrades opened doors to many other wealthy and influential Sikhs who were more valuable as indirect parties to the IFA. They also engaged in

correspondence with a number of Sikh soldiers in the Indian Army, who were sympathetic to our mission. Consequently, we had a little access to information about military movements, the location of weapons and resources, and any other various bits of wisdom that these soldiers would occasionally part with.

It was connections like these which enabled the IFA's operation, and such acquaintances were also the very foundation upon which the organisation was founded. I once asked Sachindranath about how he had met Indra, and his story imparted upon me a greater understanding of how our leader had strung together this band of freedom fighters.

"The plurality of revolutionary groups in Bengal is sometimes overlooked," he told me. "Although they are all, seemingly, aligned in their motivations, there is also some competition between different organisations. When I first met Indra, I had found myself in the middle of a petty dispute over the ownership of some stolen revolvers. Indra had been visiting Bengal to sell some prohibited essays and such—as well as to better develop his relationships with potential buyers in the east—and he was under the care of my companions and I. At the time, we had come into possession of a substantial number of these weapons—over fifty, along with plenty of ammunition, if I recall correctly. My friends and I, who were based out of Calcutta, ran into some trouble with a group of Dacca-based revolutionaries, who, in some capacity, had assisted in obtaining the revolvers. Neither side was particularly enthusiastic about parting ways with any of the weapons, and so, Indra boldly interjected himself into the quarrel. 'Lend me three of the revolvers, along with two volunteers, and two day's time,' he had said, 'and I will return with enough firearms for both groups to part ways with satisfaction.' As you can imagine, we were taken aback by his confidence, but we also knew that he was interested in making friends with everyone involved and had no reason to lie. So, we loaned him the weapons, and a volunteer

from both groups accompanied him back to the campsite where he was staying. To our surprise—and delight—they returned two days later, not only with twenty additional revolvers, but with ten long guns as well!"

Indra had been, apparently, aware of a shipment of firearms that had been on its way to a distributor in Calcutta. How, with only two conspirators armed with revolvers, he had managed to rob these poor victims of thirty firearms is, unfortunately, a trick of the trade to which I never became privy to. Sachindranath had not directly addressed my inquiry, but his anecdote had portrayed the nature of Indra's rise to power. Indra was decisive and direct; when presented with a problem, he did not hesitate to take the initiative.

India is rich in diversity. Its coffers are overflowing with pride and identity. We all look to align with our histories, cultures, families, and—the corruptive crowning jewel of the mind—our religions. How could the home of so many factions come together to pursue a single goal? India's greatest deficit—for all of its magnificent cultural wealth—is found in its distribution of resources. This is not to suggest that our fruitful land has gone barren but, rather, to emphasise the importance of the satisfaction of each of our pluralities. We are never Indians alone, but Muslims and Hindus; we belong to the Muslim League and the Congress; we are Sikhs and Christians; followers of the Arya Samaj and the Brahmo Samaj; we call ourselves Punjabis, Bengalis, Tamils, Moplahs, and so on; our histories harken back to the Marathas and the Mughals. The factions of India are not interested in sufficiency—this is too dangerous of a game. They require security—from each other—and so they seek the power to protect and advance their interests alone.

The Raj knew this. Indeed, this deficit of ours had been manufactured by our tyrants. They gatekept the legitimate means of influence, forcing us to construct our own chaotic

institutions. Who would protect India's Muslims from the oppression of the majority but the Muslims themselves? Who would guard against a repetition of Mughal brutality if not the Sikhs? Who would defend the traditions and values of India if not its Hindu masses? But there was never adequate representation for these peoples; No outlet through which our ambitious and brilliant youths could serve their communities.

I remember the aftermath of the blow dealt to Bashir's heart when he was rejected by the Civil Service. Who, on this earth, could have been more qualified than the optimistic and intuitive Bashir? From my own youth, I can remember my white peers and teachers at the missionary school. This was England's greatest insult: so much effort was dedicated to convincing us that we were inferior—that we required the guidance of Europe—while making no effort to substantiate these accusations. When we sent our soldiers into the West to fight for the Empire during the Great War, did the British think that we would be amazed by their prowess as warriors and strategists? No, our veterans were not struck in awe; they returned with stories of abuse and disappointment.

But one did not have to travel to Europe to size up the British. Even as young children, the other Indian students and myself would suppress our inherent contempt for our English peers. I attended my classes with many talented and remarkable counterparts, but none of us were ever so foolish to buy into our hopes that academic skill could take us very far. Not as far—at the very least—as the white students. They were not special; they demonstrated no natural competence which, with diligence, we could never aspire to equal.

I have not kept in touch with any of my past schoolmates but, a couple of decades ago, chance reunited me with one of my past classmates whom I had always regarded as exceptionally bright. We struck up a brief conversation about where our lives had taken us, and

he revealed to me that he had taken up a position within the bureaucracy of Burma. Truly, this broke my heart to hear, but he could not seem to understand the distress his tale evoked in me.

"What could compel you to participate in such a crime?" I exclaimed. "Have you, an Indian, no empathy for the Burmese people? It is no different than how the British have robbed us of our own government!"

Still, my old acquaintance was unmoved; but I am not so disgusted by him as I am saddened. He was a victim—a pawn—of the Raj's ruthless policies. It would be unfair to attribute too much blame to this one fool, when so many ambitious Indians took the Raj's bait by robbing and abusing the people of Burma. If the British would not grant us a way to vent our political energies within our own borders, who am I to criticise the bureaucrats who gave in to the temptations of Burma.

But Indra offered his followers an alternative route. Without official positions through which we could use our gifts and ambitions, we looked to institutions of the people. For those who could not align with the slow and moderate politics of the Congress or the League—which just about all of us in the IFA could not—Indra offered a life of purpose. His leadership was predicated on a thorough understanding of India's diversity, as well as its exploitation by the Raj. He acknowledged the fears and needs of his followers, and hastily worked to remedy them.

Indra's response to dissatisfaction was always action. Just as he had taken the initiative to appease the feuding Bengalis, he had consolidated power in the Punjab through quick thinking and sheer hard work. As a byproduct of youth and radicalism, many revolutionaries had wasted their energies by floundering around with purposeless acts of dacoity. Indra, however, always had a direction. He had quickly aligned himself with Amritsar's Arya Samaj—a relationship which shocked anyone who learned that he was an atheist. Nevertheless, he had forged this

strange partnership by leaning upon shared goals and principles. His early robberies had not been random or meaningless, but had enabled him to provide for his dependents and allies. With Indra offering the Arya Samaj's students valuable debate, and with the generous flow of funds and resources to support the temple's charitable works, Swamiji was eventually able to overlook their religious differences.

In similar fashion, Indra amassed Muslim, Sikh, and Bengali followers. He never viewed a person in terms of what they could do for him, but by what he could do for them. I imagine that he offered many of our other comrades what he had given me: purpose. The rest of us did our best to emulate his tolerance and compassion. When I think back about my time with the Indian Freedom Association, I am baffled by the differences we—under Indra's guidance—put aside. We were so preoccupied by the importance of our mission that we viewed each other not as followers of a religion or members of an ethnicity, but as comrades, united in our commitment to change.

A revolutionary's life is demanding, and very infrequently is it exciting. There were times—usually following the execution of a more significant crime or robbery—when we felt pressured to go into hiding for weeks on end. There were even times—when smuggling resources or books—when we would spend some duration in the wilderness between cities and villages. It was during these days that I must admit—but without embarrassment—that I disregarded any notions of religion or caste. Indeed, there were many nights that I slept in the same room, or by the same fire, as my Muslim comrades. You may be shocked to learn that I, Jathai, a follower of the Arya Samaj, did sometimes eat off the same plate as my Muslim brother, Mohan. But I feel no shame in the fraternity that Indra inspired in us. Rather, I feel shame for how quickly I, and the rest of India, discarded and forgot this kinship.

As impressive as it was in Amritsar, the network of the IFA extended far beyond the boundaries of the city. It did not take me long to recognize how elaborate and reaching Indra's operations were. He was connected with informants and revolutionaries across the subcontinent. From Calcutta, he frequently received news from two students attending the university. In Lahore, he was friends with one of the most influential merchants in the Hindu bazaars. To my astonishment, I would become aware of a correspondence between Indra and the great freedom fighter, Har Dayal, in America.

There are many tantalising ways to portray the revolution as riveting and death-defying. I am lucky to not have been one of the many restless youths who had gravitated towards our work based on these expectations. Personally, I was driven by rage; my satisfaction was solely based on the belief that my actions were having an effect on the Raj. I do not suppose I ever had any meaningful impact but, because everything we did put us in danger of arrest, it certainly felt as though I was making a difference.

With the IFA, I spent much time writing—translating, mostly. Robberies and smuggling operations were few and far between, and even those were less eventful than most hoped. You see, if an affair was eventful, it typically meant that something had gone wrong; and when something goes wrong in the business of revolution, there are dire consequences.

6

On 4 February 1923, our young Narendranath's antics finally caught up to him. Even before reaching the door, Bashir and I could hear the commotion from inside Moolmati's shop. Typically, the limitation of all activities to the basement of the shop was a strictly followed rule—which both Indra and Moolmati enforced with an iron fist—but, on this crucial afternoon, an emotional crowd had filled both floors. I followed closely behind Bashir as he nudged his way to the back of the shop in an attempt to uncover the reason for the unusual clamour. I recognized everyone we passed: it was mostly the Bengalis—and their wives, children, and other family members—but it seemed as though almost every member of the IFA was present. I also noticed a handful of faces from the Arya Samaj, who were not directly involved in the Association, including Swamiji.

There was a shared expression of concern among everyone in the packed room. People were talking over each other; they all sounded as though they were looking for answers themselves. Moolmati, for once, was not behind her table, but was engaged in a fast paced interrogation by the Bengali wives who were bombarding her with more questions than she could answer. I spotted Indra—towering over the heads around him—who was similarly preoccupied in attempting to moderate the mayhem. Only Sachindranath seemed to express any apprehension for the potential attention we were drawing to the shop. He was standing guard in front of the doorway that led to the basement, making sure that no one who did not belong to the IFA could make their way down the stairs. His unease was apparent as he muttered under his breath what I assumed to be condemnation of everyone else's foolishness.

"What has happened?" Bashir urgently inquired when we had finally made our way to Sachindranath's side.

"See for yourself," he replied, gesturing for us to descend to the basement.

After we had squeezed past his shoulder, Sachindranath returned to warding off the frantic visitors. At the bottom of the staircase, we found that the basement, too, was undergoing the same pandemonium. In the main room, we found more of the Bengali IFA members, as well as Mohan. Our initial attempts to extract an explanation from the others failed, as anyone who was not pursuing the same information was invested in what appeared to be some important task. Finally, Raghuvir—Indra's friend from Lahore, who was something of an authority in the Shah Alami Bazaar—approached us with a solemn disposition. The look in his eyes warned us that—whatever had caused this uproar—we would not be ecstatic to learn the news. Regardless, Raghuvir was the first person we believed we could get answers from, so we asked.

"Everytime I have visited Amritsar," he began, "I have told Indra that that Naren boy was bound to get himself in real trouble. Well! Now that trouble has come!"

"Naren? He has not been caught taunting the Englishmen has he?" I asked, but both Bashir and I had understood what had happened as soon as Narendranath's name was invoked.

"No, not caught, but perhaps that would have been better. The stupid boy was in the city, around the Golden Temple, they said, when he spotted some Englishmen in uniforms. Soldiers, they said—three of them. Of course, Naren could not help but take the opportunity to harass them with some obscenities. Thankfully, the Englishmen must not have understood what he was saying—Gupteshwar and the others said that the soldiers were entertained by the boy or something to that extent." He gestured to a corner of the room, where Gupteshwar, Kapil, and Jagdev looked to be explaining what had happened to Mohan. "Then, Naren changed strategies

and tried to distract the soldiers by directing their attention to the Golden Temple. When he saw his opportunity, he reached into one of their pockets, pulled out a pocket watch, and turned heel.

"The little thief!" Bashir cried.

"Well, he is not a very talented thief, unfortunately. The Sikhs said that they saw the whole thing unfold, and that the boy had not made it two steps before the Englishmen realised what had happened. They chased after him—with the Sikhs in pursuit as well—and caught Naren behind some house after a decent attempt at an escape. By the time Gupteshwar, Kapil, and Jagdev arrived, they found the Englishmen kicking and pounding on the poor boy, who was curled up on the ground. Pathetic as they may be, the soldiers were not foolish enough to want any trouble with the Sikhs, so they took the pocket watch and left."

It was an appalling story, but what was worse was the aftermath: not wanting to risk getting Naren into anymore trouble—at this point, most of the city's authorities new his face, and the beating he received *had* been the result of an attempted crime—the Sikhs carried the boy to Moolmati's. Word spread quickly and, as Naren was a frequent guest at the Arya Samaj and in the Bengali homes, a concerned mass swarmed the shop to inquire about his condition. The beating, it turned out, was much more severe than was originally thought (and, I imagine, likely more severe than the soldiers had intended). Indra arranged for a friend of his—a doctor who had never affiliated with the IFA—to come to Moolati's shop to check on Naren. Raghuvir's wife, Meera, had also been allowed to see young Naren, having had some knowledge in medicine.

They took the boy into the second room in the basement, so that the doctor could enter through the cellar door and not be exposed to the contraband in the main room. Naren had moved very little since the incident, and now several hours had passed and he had not regained his

strength. To the despair of everyone in Moolmati's shop, it was revealed that the boy's spine had been damaged, and that he had lost the use of his legs.

What evil could have possessed Narendranath's savage assailants? Only once in my life—four years ago, with the murder of my mother—had I been comparably consumed by the feeling of burning and vengeful anger. And still, I knew that however enraged I was, I could not have been so devastated as the families to whom Naren was like a son; the dread and hatred I endured could not have equaled that of Gupteshwar, Kapil, and Jagdev, who had been so close to preventing the beating.

As the day drew to an end Moolmati's shop was mostly vacated; Bashir and I remained, along with Indra, Mohan, Raghuvir, Meera, and the doctor, to watch over Naren. I did not necessarily choose to stay behind, rather, I chose not to leave. Throughout the night, Meera and the doctor did not withdraw from the boy's side. Indra and Mohan mostly kept to themselves, somberly discussing some topic with lowered tones; every now and then, it appeared to me that Indra would get frustrated with Mohan as though they were in the midst of a disagreement. As for Bashir and myself we sat, with our backs to a wall, next to a heap of political essays and propaganda. For the greater portion of that night, we were deathly silent; neither of us were eager to address the disturbing situation at hand.

In our reticence, I contemplated the involuntary emotions which had laid claim to my mind. Involuntary in the sense that I had no choice in feeling them; but I enjoyed their sensations. I relished the strength, the drive, that this anger granted my soul. Malignant thoughts would build in my consciousness telling me to lash out, even if only with words. Like waves, these thoughts would reach a towering height but, before I could act, the reasonable side of me would catch myself. I struggled with this cycle for a while until, at last, I turned to my friend.

"What are we supposed to do in the face of such evil?" Bashir met my gaze as I continued. "I want to believe that evil is meant to be tracked down and hunted; that injustice should be nipped at the bud, before it can further spread its suffering. Indra claims that anything we can do to combat these evils will be for the good of India. I want to believe these things because I want to deliver the same pain—perhaps more—to those who have hurt the people I care about. But my constitution wavers; for I know that, should I act, it would not be for India. If it *is* the end that justifies the means, then surely the end must be pure. My end would be vengeance; I would revel in the blows I dealt and the blood I spilt. I am tired of feeling helpless and trivial. I could not act for India, nor for justice, because my selfishness occupies my heart and mind. But what, then, is left for me to do? If I restrain myself—if I will not take every measure to see that grievances are corrected—while children are maimed and mothers are murdered without repercussion, can that be justice? Bashir, be my compass and my guide; you must tell me what is right."

But he gave no answer. I knew that the same war was being waged within him; truthfully, I did not expect a response. As I would soon discover, I was far from the only one who had been so severely shaken by Naren's beating. On the other side of the room, where Indra and Mohan were still intensely conversing, a far more consequential development was underway.

That night passed slowly, and so too did the next. Naren's strength eventually returned, and much of the damage he had incurred healed; but his legs remained useless. Kalicharan—one of the more wealthy Bengalis—and his family took the boy under their care permanently, and so his seemingly constant presence came to an end. It had been annoying, but endearing, when he had followed right behind us, everywhere we went, often treading on our heels by mistake. Our

plans and debates lost their old excitement, as Naren had booed and cheered for each argument and counter (more for the sake of entertainment than for his opinion on the subjects).

Naren had added a levity to the otherwise heavy and cheerless work of the IFA. The life of a revolutionary exists in a disheartening paradox, in which all of their decisions come with the risk of great and dire consequences, and yet, they remain manifestly inconsequential. If you lose the anchor which connects you to the virtues of life—if you allow yourself to linger upon the suffocating pressure of that paradox—the impulses of emotion may become too strong to resist. This is what drives the rational to act irrationally; indeed, the ensuing act of Mohan could only be described as irrational.

In the winter months, the Punjabi sun's oppression subsides. The temperature falls to a more recognizable condition to a European, though still not quite so low as the coldest days I experienced in London. It was on the last day of this bitter February that—as we once again made our way to Moolmati's shop—Bashir and I were struck by an eerily familiar sensation. This time, there was no noise or disturbance emanating from inside. Quite the opposite, actually; if a normally quiet place can somehow become *more* quiet, Moolmati's shop managed that day. How, then, were we aware that something was afoot? We were met by a sight that we had never before seen: Moolmati herself, sitting outside of her place of work. With a ghostly expression, she stared out into the distance, not even acknowledging Bashir and I as we passed by. I hesitated before entering, fearing that whatever awaited us would be as grave as Naren's assault.

There was no one inside the shop. Again, our advance wavered; I locked eyes with Bashir, and we silently asked ourselves if we truly wished to discover what had occurred. Bashir led the way, only to stop, once again, as we reached the stairway. I thought about Moolmati, sitting alone outside; she had been well dressed for the season (she had no shortage of clothing,

of course) but it was still disturbing to see her, motionless, in the cold. Had she been angry? It would explain why she had not even looked at us. Then again, why would she not have barred our entrance if this was the case? Had something frightened her? No doubt, she would have fled beyond her own doorstep. Perhaps she was standing guard, I wondered.

As we slowly descended down the stairs, we finally heard voices. I recognized them to be Indra's and Mohan's. As Bashir and I came into sight, the speaking paused, and all of the eyes in Moolmati's basement focused on the two of us. The room was split into two groups, facing each other, with Sachindranath, Indra, and a few others on one side, and Mohan, Gupteshwar, Kapil, and Jagdev on the other.

"Bashir, Jathai. Good afternoon," Indra said, without offering an explanation for the odd circumstances.

"What has happened?" I asked, skipping the formalities.

"It would be best, I think, for Mohan to answer that question."

Mohan and the Sikh's were visibly aroused, as though they were prepared for a battle. Mohan obeyed the suggestion, and boastfully detailed to us a momentous and daunting story that had unfolded only hours earlier. I could not believe what I was hearing; my jaw hung open, my eyes wide with shock. I cannot recall Bashir's response, nor the expressions of Indra and the others. In these few minutes my entire world was shrunk to Mohan's face. I watched his lips, hoping that the words my ears were picking up were somehow incorrect. No, my hearing did not deceive me; but still I could not make sense of the look in his eyes. The pride and confidence embedded in his gaze was incomprehensible in the context of what he was articulating.

Since Naren's paralysation, then almost a whole month ago, the three Sikhs, under Mohan's instruction, had been tracking down the English culprits. For weeks, they watched,

followed, and studied the soldiers' patterns. They had almost entirely mapped out the Englishmen's habits and schedules, and could reliably predict their daily movements. How these four conspirators had managed to enact such a scheme while drawing the attention of neither their victims nor the rest of the IFA is beyond me. I could recall noticing the increased absence of the Gupteshwar and the other two throughout the month, but it had been a fleeting and inconsequential observation.

The night before, their weeks of cautious stalking were put to work. It was not far from the very place that Naren had been beaten, that the Sikhs had noticed one of the three soldiers pass through, almost nightly, when the sun had set. What—I wondered—could possess an Englishmen to stroll, alone, in the darkness, through the alien streets of his tyrannised subjects? Such comfortability in the midst of hostility could have only been attributed to arrogance, I imagined. Fitting, for how could the Raj, itself, be described in any other word?

Under the cover of the dark and cold Punjabi night sky, Mohan had pressed a pistol to the Englishman's spine. He whispered a threat in the soldier's ear. Gupteshwar had pulled a bag over their captive's head. Carefully and slowly—a terrible and unsettling eternity it must have felt, for kidnapper and hostage alike—they shuffled through the city, with Mohan continuously issuing intimidations and his accomplices ensuring that the way was clear of spectators. At last, they arrived at Moolmati's store. Entering through the cellar door, they sat their victim down in the basement's second room. Gagging him, and tightly binding him to a chair, the four rogues had left him, awaiting Indra's eventual arrival.

This story was astonishing, and I could hardly wrap my mind around the foolishness of the act. But the overwhelming truth of the whole affair—the detail which broke any composure my sanity had retained—Mohan had conveniently left for the end of his monologue. I admit, a

part of me was impressed by the account of their efforts; but the final twist, the careless and devastating mistake, foiled Mohan's plan in its entirety. They had abducted the wrong man.

I nearly laughed. How else could I respond to such a total and incredible failure? These four criminals had not only conscripted themselves for hanging, but had endangered the lives of every single affiliate of the IFA—members, families, Moolmati, would all be seen as accomplices to the kidnapping of an English soldier. And for what? Perhaps it was a jeopardy we would have been willing to suffer, had it been to avenge the beloved Narendranath; but the boy's assailants all walked free, and we had nothing to show for their terrible gamble but a random and extraneous life.

Mohan could see my disgust but, in his own eyes, he had done nothing wrong. "Do not look at me with such incredulousness, Jathai. Do not judge us as though our retaliation is unwarranted. What do you think a freedom fighter's purpose is, if not to fight? What kind of nationalist does not defend the sanctity of their nation? What is a revolutionary who does not believe in revolution? We have acted upon our beliefs and pride, and will not now be condemned by our own comrades! This is the life that we have all chosen—and it is not a life of cowardice and neglect. I will not sit idly by as the people of India are insulted by foreign masters! The crimes of the Raj will not go unanswered! Tell me, Jathai, do you think we wallowed in despair after the Jallianwala Bagh? Do you think we tucked our tails inbetween our legs, waiting for the next atrocity? No! You may have ran off to London, but we remained. We did not rest; and we have done worse than what repulses you tonight."

"Enough, Mohan," Indra cut him off with authority. Our leader looked to be deep in thought, but unphased. He was never one to fold under pressure; always a beacon of light in the storm. "What has happened has happened. The four of you have plunged us all into the

irreversible, and have done so without our consent, I should note. You have recklessly played with our lives, and have decided this soldier's fate. It is set in stone. Mohan, you have done enough, and I will not ask anyone else to conclude this affair. None of you understand the weight of what has transpired, nor need such guilt on your souls. I will kill this man myself."

Indra did not immediately follow through with this plan. Eventually, the tension in the room dissipated, as we waited for him to execute our prisoner. I do not know why Indra took so long; he was mostly silent, standing apart from the rest of us with Sachindranath. He must have been thinking about his options, hoping to envision a future in which he did not have to take this man's life. Or, perhaps, he was set upon the soldier's death, and was only preparing himself for the deed.

In the meantime, it grew dark; Jagdev fell asleep. At some point, Sachindranath slipped off to his home. Mohan apologised for accusing me of running away after my mother's death (I forgave him easily, though it had hurt at the time). I, too, apologised for my condemnation (although I had not actually voiced this judgement). In fact, as the night's hours passed, I found myself sympathising with Mohan and the Sikh's. I recalled the effect that Naren's paralysis had had on me that day; the thirst for blood that had overcome my reason. In Mohan's eyes I saw only a reflection of myself. That night, I felt my rage revived.

Before Indra took up his weapon, I determined that I would not be a passive accomplice in this incident. "I want to see him. Let me talk to the Englishman alone."

"Is it wise?" Mohan asked. "You have more reason to be impassioned by all of this than most of us."

But I was resolute, and Indra—with a hint of suspicion in his gaze—allowed me to enter the second room by myself. None had noticed the knife that I had slipped into my sleeve. I

turned around to close the door behind me, and for a few moments I stood, facing away from the soldier, taking in calming breaths. I turned to him; he was tightly bound to his chair, his face was still covered by a cloth sack. He must have heard me enter, because he began to distressingly mumble through his gag.

He was seated in front of the large wooden table. It was the same table that Naren had been laid upon during that tragic night. There was another chair, positioned across from the Englishman, but I did not take it. Looking at this defenceless man, I discovered in myself an inexplicable repulsion, one which was only escalated by his pitious groans. For all I knew, he was as innocent as an Englishmen could be. He had not laid a finger on Naren; he likely had no knowledge of—let alone quarrel with—the Indian Freedom Association; his only reason for being tied to that chair was having been in the wrong place at the wrong time. And yet, I loathed him. I could not see his face, but I did not need to. At that moment, that one man represented the cumulative oppression that I had experienced throughout my life for no reason beyond my nation of birth. He was the man who had ordered for the crowd at the Jallianwala Bagh to be fired upon. He was the official who had rejected Bashir's admission into the Civil Service. He was the brute who had beaten young Naren within an inch of his life. He was the British Empire itself.

I placed the knife on the table and addressed the prisoner in English. "I do not know what the others have told you—maybe nothing. There is a table in front of you. A little boy nearly died on it earlier this month. He survived, thank God, but he can no longer walk. I wonder if you know about this boy? Surely, you know the perpetrators of his assault. Did they brag about their hard fought victory over a child? Maybe you heard about how they had disciplined an unruly dacoit. Well, now that dacoit's mischievous days are behind him; he has no choice but to submit to your will and abuse.

"Do you remember that ordeal, last year, with Chauri Chaura? Three protesters were killed in the town—if I remember correctly—simply over high food prices. They were non-violent protesters, of course, but it seems to be a trend under the Raj that suppression is indiscriminate in its use of violence. Anyways, the people of Chauri Chaura did not take these deaths lightly, and the protesters grew quite violent themselves. They chased the police back to their chowki, and set the whole building ablaze! The entire police force, all Indians, were burned alive over what? Food prices? I can walk to the Arya Samaj, or even the Golden Temple, and be fed without cost! Indians, spilling Indian blood, lighting flames for their true enemy to sit back and fan. I applaud you, I applaud all of the English, for you have pulled the strings of India like master puppeteers.

"Now, personally, I do not wish to *condone* the deaths of those policemen. But, I will not disguise my empathy for that furious mob. I no longer wish to cast judgement on those who are consumed by their grief. Irrational circumstances render irrational responses fit. Of course, the Congress did not see things this way. The very Congress which had ordered the people to put down their arms, showed no pity for those who suffered the consequences of their vulnerability. Gandhi ordered for the entire non-cooperation movement to freeze in its tracks. Men like Gandhi, you see, are more concerned with optics than reality.

"I daresay he showed his true colours at that moment. Gandhi insults the sacrifices made by India's true heroes. He cannot possibly understand the struggles of the revolutionary, because he has intentionally detached himself from them. Pacifists, dreamers, those who claim the moral high ground—they do not wish to confront the brutality, the unpleasantry and the discomfort that freedom demands of us. I admit, I have often allowed myself to deteriorate into this weakness. I have envied peace and feared retaliation. In this moment, you have placed me in great danger,

and a part of me wishes to flee from whatever consequences await. But what good would that do? To what fate would I escape? I can live under the thumb of the Raj—I can watch as those around me are treated as less than human; I can suffer the abuses of my ungracious despot—but I will be safe; I will be able to pursue a normal and comfortable life, and even continue the fight for my country through different channels. Or, I can stay here. I can hide my affiliations and beliefs from the Raj and—out of fear of their implication—the people I care about. I can risk my life everyday knowing that, when I am finally caught or killed, it will be a thankless and forgotten end. But I will know that I did not concede to the rule of those who batter children and murder mothers.

"This is the dilemma which I must face, starting now, with you. You are a seemingly innocent man; you did not perpetrate the crime for which you have been detained. But perhaps you were there—at the Jallianwala Bagh. Perhaps you were one of the men responsible for the massacre or, perhaps, you yourself fired upon that unarmed mass. Alternatively, perhaps you had no hand in the affair at all. Perhaps you were not even in India, at the time. It does not matter, truthfully; I do not need to know your name or see your face. I do not need to know your story. In a way, it does not even matter that you are innocent of crippling my young friend. None of you Englishmen are more responsible for what has happened in India than the rest. You collectively bear the guilt of the British Raj.

"I am an infuriated mob whom you have greatly harmed. I am unsure what my next step *should* be, but an opportunity has been presented, and in my mind the same question repeats: shall I toss you into the burning building?"

Something about my voice must have been unsettling for—before I finished speaking—the soldier had begun fighting his restraints and crying out through his gag. *A construct,* Mrs.

Blair had called India: *Designed by perverse and cunning architects*. In every possible way, those architects had designed India to strip its people of their power. But at that moment, more than at any point in my life, I did not feel so powerless. Not even the feeling of joining the IFA could compare. At that moment the roles had reversed, even if only within the confines of a small room in the basement of a clothing repair shop at the edge of Amritsar. One of those "perverse and cunning architects" was at my mercy; I was now the designer of his fate.

In my right hand I reached for, and gripped, the knife. With my left, I partially lifted the bag on the soldier's head. I did not lift it high enough for him to see me or, even, enough for me to get a good look at my victim's face. I briefly paused to consider removing the bag entirely. A part of me was curious about what he looked like. But it did not matter; he did not matter. He was not one man. With the knife, I slit his pale throat. I stepped back and watched as, gargling and convulsing, he died.

7

A lawyer's responsibility is the legal favour of their client, regardless of how favourable their client's position is. If all of a case's evidence is stacked against them, the lawyer does not abandon their position. A good lawyer will consider the likely, the possible, and the desirable, in that order. Conversely, a good lawyer will first argue for the desirable, adjust to the possible when it is clear that the desirable is unattainable, and, finally, accept the likely when deprived of all the former aspirations. But it is crucial that these concessions are forced; that the lawyer has fought tooth-and-nail for any extractable inch of progression towards the ideal outcome. Within this practice is a delicate balance. Dwell too long on a goal, when the goal has been explicitly denied possibility, and you will lose your chance to obtain any favourable outcomes at all.

The plight of the lawyer is shared by the freedom fighter. All of the evidence in our case was stacked against us; we were dedicated to independence through revolution, yet none of the circumstances nor conditions which applied to us suggested the possibility of success. But the lawyer does not, cannot, concede. One who quits on their client is decidedly not a lawyer, and one who quits on their nation is decidedly not a freedom fighter. I think, unfortunately, that we did not meet this delicate balance which lawyers and freedom fighters alike must meet. In spite of the glaring impracticality, Indra had clung to the idea of total independence through armed uprising, the way the British had clung to the embarrassment that the Raj had begun to become. But we knowingly followed our champion into imminent self-destruction.

After the incident with the English soldier, my commitment to this self-destruction was never questioned. There were ramifications, to be sure, but they came with a newfound respect—

or fear—from the other revolutionaries. Indra and Sachindranath felt it necessary to respond to my behaviour by placing me on a temporary form of probation, but it was apparent that these measures were more for optics than they were for punishment. After all, Indra had already planned on executing the soldier himself.

While my actions had not had any real effect on the outcome of the situation, I had clearly made no attempt to seek approval beforehand. The hierarchy of the Indian Freedom Association was intentionally loose and unauthoritative, but there had still been a need for a rudimentary acknowledgment of leadership. I suspect that Sachindranath would have preferred for the consequences to have been a bit harsher, but Indra—who was more surprised than he was upset—opted to let me off quite lightly. For the next month, I was not allowed in Moolmati's basement without supervision (naturally, Bashir took up that mantle), and my access to any of the Association's weapons was temporarily revoked.

I accepted these repercussions without complaint, as the weight of what I had done had caused an irreversible transformation within me. I knew that I was now fully committed; I had proven to myself that there were no boundaries that I would not cross. There was no longer any difference between the vigour of Mohan and the Sikhs' dedication to the IFA and my own. The length of my probation, consequently, felt like only a passing moment. Internally, I was captivated by my hypnotising metamorphosis into radicalism, I could hardly notice such minor inconveniences.

The coming years were the most meaningful time of my life. Killing that soldier was the day that I became worthy of Sachindranath's future stories. I quickly increased my participation in our revolution, and Bashir and myself eventually rose to a similar degree of influence within the IFA as Mohan, Sachindranath, and Indra. The five of us spent much of our time together,

organising resistance and resource distribution throughout the province. I came to see less of my father, and it was not long until there was an unspoken understanding between the two of us that he was aware of my dealings. Any night that I came to our home, he would refrain from inquiring about my absences. There were weeks, even, that I would disappear to fulfil my duties, and on my return he would pretend as though I had never left. The truth of my life was, I suppose, too much for him to confront.

The mundane reality of being a revolutionary did not change much over my years in the IFA but, over time, the growth of our machinations produced some variety in our activity. Defying the law requires its own unique set of skills. When one chooses to operate beyond the approval of their government, they also surrender whatever protections are provided by that authority (though, in our case, these were negligible to begin with). How to distribute proscribed texts, acquire contraband for ourselves, identify sympathisers, and—what would prove to be our most challenging task—procure weapons, were all skills that could only be developed through time and experience. In all of these efforts, we made very slow progress through a discouraging—and nerve racking—process of trial and error.

We had no shortage of products to be sold. Indra wrote brilliant English and Hindi treatises, essays, and poems with self-evident political and nationalist messages. Our leader was a student of Western revolution. In both his writings and his speech, Indra frequently referenced and alluded to Mazzini, Voltaire, Paine, Marx, and Lenin. He was a part of a popular wave of socialism amongst Indian revolutionaries, and was well read in economics and political theory. Indra was not, nonetheless, so infatuated by these Western minds that he—like my father—elevated them above the abundance of ingenuity from within our own people. He was a scholar

of Indian minds; he once wrote a brief biography on the great mathematician, Srinivasa Ramanujan, in which he concluded the following:

> "When someone speaks of the 'Jewel in the Crown', know that they are talking about Ramanujan. In Ramanujan, the British saw potential and value; they took him, hoping to extract his worth, without concern for his culture or his health. So young was he in death, with such a promising and unknown future. But the Indian is treated as a resource, not a human."

I very much admired the deliberateness and vision with which Indra wrote. They were qualities which my own writing did not share. My thoughts were piloted by intuition and my moral compass; but, whenever I wished to map out my identity and beliefs onto paper, I could not navigate through the untamed emotions that commandeered my reason.

Had I possessed the same affinity with words as Sachindranath, I could have evaded this problem altogether. The Bengali embraced his own emotions, allowing them to pour out onto the pages as he wrote. The size of a dictionary does not change from person to person; and yet, there are some whose writing would convince you that the limitations to your ink and pen do not apply to them. My strengths never lied in metaphor, which Sachindranath, the poet, almost exclusively dealt with.

There was not much monetary value in apolitical poems—enlightening as they may have been. Unfortunately, the revolutionary is an instrumentalist, and Sachindranath would occasionally have to use his grandiloquent talents for more marketable mediums. When I had originally joined the IFA in the summer of 1923, Sachindranath had enjoyed the freedom to mostly channel his efforts into his poetry but, in tangent with the increasing needs and

responsibilities of our operation, he gradually transitioned towards becoming our foremost propagandist. The adjustment was not difficult; hyperbole is the natural progression after description. With his colourful vocabulary, Sachindranath did not need to put very much effort into his propaganda. Poetry is the art of depicting the ambiguities that come with nuisance, and propaganda is the art of simplification.

Every word is simplification; complexity must be deconstructed and ration must be eviscerated. Propaganda must be monotonous; there can never be any room for question. There are the tyrants and the victims, heroes and cowards, justice and injustice. Sachindranath's toolbox mainly consisted of words like *patriot*, *comrade*, *good* and *evil*, *empire*, *brutality*, *revolution*, *Swadeshi*, *Swaraj*, and *Aryavarta*. Perhaps my aversion to such writing lied in my commitment to truth. I wished for the lofty ideals and straightforward conflicts portrayed by Sachindranath to be true; but the longer I fought against the Raj, the more these myths unravelled in front of my own eyes.

Producing our textual contraband was the easy part of the job; dissemination was the challenge. It was made easier by Indra's extensive list of friends. In Calcutta, our writings could be found among the radical circles of college students. In Lahore, Raghuvir allowed select vendors to discreetly sell our work in his bazaar. Our most lucrative patronage did not, however, come from the limited business of our allies. The best way to distribute our products into the hands of those who were truly interested, was to insert ourselves into the densest concentration of nationalists and revolutionaries. Though we did not think that the Indian National Congress did much good for the people, we were thankful for its reliable congregation of customers at its annual sessions.

Unfortunately, the Congress' sessions were held in different cities, on different dates, every year. Furthermore, these locations truly emphasised the expansiveness of the Indian subcontinent. Gandhi took the 39th session to Belgaum, while the 40th was held in Cawnpore. To make best use of these congregations, then, took months of planning in advance. We not only needed to find ways to sell our work without apprehension, but we also needed to smuggle ourselves and the contraband such great distances. These endeavours occupied the majority of our energies for much of the year and, though they were not the invigorating battles that a revolutionary dreams of, I came to appreciate the scale and danger that they seemed to bring.

The battles that we waged in our war against the Raj were rarely against the Raj itself. The greatest enemy of the underground freedom fighter is logistics. Many of the things I say about the IFA may sound boring to you—truthfully, they were—but so much of my involvement was spent translating texts and managing correspondents that any irregularity was welcomed. A universal truth is that every revolutionary wants a revolver (some even join the revolution on account of this prospect), but there are few items more difficult to procure than a functioning firearm. It is true that, in some rural territories of the Raj, it was not rare to find these sorts of weapons. However, even in the most liberally governed regions of the subcontinent, the authorities made a point to keep track of weapons and ammunition. We often contemplated travelling to Calcutta to purchase guns, but such a task would likely prove more costly than it would have been worth. Not only on account of Calcutta's distance from Amritsar, but because the guns in these markets were sold at incredible costs and none of us were overly enthusiastic for the potential attention we would draw to ourselves by purchasing large quantities of expensive firearms in the city.

The alternative, though safer, was not much more appealing. With enough persistence, and money, it was possible to identify gun dealers in Punjab and the United Provinces. These transactions, unfortunately, epitomised every trouble faced by extra-judicial parties. A naive revolutionary is the scam artist's favourite customer; undoubtedly, many swindlers profited handsomely during the first couple decades of this century. Most of the weapons we could get our hands on were old and poorly kept. Revolvers were an absolute rarity, and the reliability of the ammunition for all of our firearms was dubious.

It was rather embarrassing to call oneself a revolutionary when the means of revolution were strikingly absent. We had neither an army nor a desire for one, as we would never have been able to adequately supply many more than fifty soldiers. For all of the self-purporting revolutionaries during this time, there was a curious lack of meaningful or threatening rebellions. In fact, after the Mutiny of 1857, our people could never seem to put together a critical mass of armed nationalists. It should, in our defence, be remembered that the sepoys—employed as soldiers under the East India Company's rule—who had taken up arms against the British in 1857, were already well equipped, trained, and organised when they initiated their fruitless revolt. Conversely, we were forced to be content with whatever defective weaponry we could scavenge from the black markets.

With our capabilities stunted, so too were our ambitions. Indra always expected our efforts to culminate into the inspiration of a larger movement, but he acknowledged that the groundwork first needed to be laid. Coordination had to be established, experienced leaders needed to be developed, and the people needed to have faith in their own strength. The menial work to which we committed the majority of our time served to progress the first two requirements, but more daring and performative moves were needed to fulfil the third.

The masses only witness the bombs and the revolvers. It was intentional, of course, that most of our work was conducted in secrecy. Nevertheless, we were never comfortable knowing of the incomplete perception that the public had of our efforts. We regarded ourselves as more than lawless dacoits but, on occasion, some dacoity was needed to remind the world that India was not compliant in her oppression. The people of India, too, needed to be galvanised from time to time. For this purpose, different revolutionaries chose different courses of action. Some robbed trains, while others lobbed explosives; the former being the most pragmatic option, the latter being the most resounding.

Assassination was the most tantalising option. Most revolutionaries, after all, joined the cause in hopes of regularly battling British authorities in the streets and throughout the country. Indra and Sachindranath, however, were not the most likely men to propose such high risk, low reward, schemes. Indra far preferred alternatives which would advance the IFA and provide for larger scale operations in the future; Sachindranath was too wily to support a plan that would surely topple everything he had worked so hard to build. Nonetheless, for as wise and forward thinking as our leaders were, Indra's dramatic streak was a compelling force. He was never overtly rash or bloodthirsty, but he had been partial to immediate and tangible results. From the first day I met him, he had imparted upon me that a revolutionary could not die in vain.

I was never fond of any of the Raj's governor-generals—they were all wrapped in the guilt of their empire—but I will admit that some were less odious than others. If one could ignore their involvement in the brutal and indefensible trampling of Indian rights—which I choose not to—Lord Reading might have appeared to be a decent man. When he took up the mantle of Viceroy in 1921, he had come to Amritsar out of respect of the victims of the massacre which had occurred under his predecessor. I suppose it would be fair to judge him in comparison with

his peers; in which case, Lord Reading's better qualities stood out. I think our perceptions of the viceroys were always quite skewed by circumstance and timing. I would say that Lord Ripon, for example, who we always remembered relatively favourably, had the benefit of replacing the unpopular and loathed Lord Lytton. Conversely, perhaps Lord Dufferin, who had succeeded Ripon, was so despised because of the shoes he filled and the "good" done by his predecessor that he worked to repeal.

It was a strange phenomenon; Indians could look to the men who most directly perpetuated their bondage and, if one of these villains was less cruel than the others, they would find cause for celebration and thankfulness. We were like thoughtless livestock who had fallen in love with the farmers who raised us to be slaughtered, only because they fed us, sheltered us, and only beat and whipped us on occasion. Anyways, Lord Irwin was far from the most despicable of our despots; but, because of the magnanimity that the masses had so carelessly attributed to Lord Reading, he was not well received. To the Indian Freedom Association, the hatred of Lord Irwin was an opportunity.

It was late in the spring of 1926, no more than two months after Lord Irwin's arrival in India as the new viceroy, when Indra arranged for Sachindranath, Mohan, Bashir, and myself to meet him at Moolmati's basement on a late night when none of the IFA's other members would be around. Bashir and I arrived together—as per usual—with the other three awaiting us. Sachindranath appeared to be as curious as we were, whereas Mohan looked to have conspired with Indra for whatever the purpose of this meeting was.

"In less than a week," said Indra, wasting no time, "Lord Irwin will arrive at Amritsar, via train, for official business. We are sitting in a room of rarely used firearms and bombs, and Mohan believes that the moment to strike has now come."

“Surely, you are not proposing that we attack the viceroy?” replied a stunned Sachindranath.

“With luck, we would accomplish more than an attack,” said Mohan. “We will assassinate the viceroy. His death will be a catalyst for the revolution; if we can show the people how vulnerable the Raj truly is, they may finally be inspired to follow suit!”

Sachindranath was shocked by the very voicing of the idea. In an uncharacteristic loss for words, he looked to Bashir and I to determine our positions.

“It is a fool’s errand” said Bashir, making his stance known. “If we do not fail at organising such a plot without being caught, we will fail in its implementation. If we somehow manage to kill the Viceroy, we will undoubtedly be killed—or caught and then killed—ourselves.”

“Have you no faith in Indra?” asked Mohan. “There is still nearly a week until Irwin’s arrival; nearly a week of planning every detail to perfection.” He could see the unease in all of our eyes, even Indra’s. But in Mohan, I saw desperation and conviction. “You are unconvinced. Perhaps, you are even afraid. Believe me when I say I understand. This is not a haphazardly thrown together proposal; I do not mean to be reckless with our lives and with everything we have created. But we have now spent so many years learning how to make bombs, studying tactics and practising with pistols. More importantly, we have spent so many years telling others to stand against injustice. We have done great things, but now these years have passed and we are no closer to Swaraj than we were when we set out to acquire it.

“There is nothing to fear but the self-resentment that we will bear if, in another three years, India remains subject to this foreigner’s whims. Instead, we have an opportunity to propel India one step closer to independence. In six days, the plan shall be refined wish insurances and

safeguards. We need not be killed nor apprehended. There is no one else in all of Amritsar with the organisation, the bravery, the tools, and the experience needed to pull off such a conspiracy. Nor can we fail, for revolutionaries are not killed: they are martyred."

"How, now after so many years, can you be so eager to throw away everything we have achieved, Mohan?" Sachindranath asked. "How can you take all of our labour and sacrifice for granted?"

"How, now after so many years," he responded, "can you remain content with the constant abuses which our people endure, Sachindranath? Who, among us, joined the Association thinking that the most we would accomplish would be the peddling of pamphlets? Why have acquired this arsenal if not to use it against the Raj? Jathai did not think he would avenge his mother's death with translations and letters! We cannot continue to wait for the next Jallianwala Bagh, or the next Chauri Chaura. It has been three years since little Naren was senselessly beaten, and I will not wait another three years for the next child to be crippled!"

"If we do this," the Bengali said in a whisper, "in three years, there will be no one to look after the next victims. A new viceroy will be appointed, stricter laws will be brought down upon the Punjabis, and we will not be around to challenge them."

It was all too familiar; my immediate reaction to Mohan's proposal was bewilderment and condemnation. No quantity of time with, and faith in, our leader could assure me that the Indian Freedom Association would survive, let alone pull off, an assassination of the Governor-General of India. It seemed to me that Mohan did not only demonstrate little value for his own life, but for those of all of his comrades.

And yet, as was all too familiar, the longer I allowed my internal voice to contemplate this possibility, the more I was drawn to Mohan's call to arms. If we were to pursue this course,

how quickly the IFA would dissolve under the wrath of the British Raj; but what was there to dissolve? What *had* we done since Naren's assault? Since the massacre at the Jallianwala Bagh? All this time we had been writing about the difference that needed to be made, but had made none ourselves.

"The five of us shall take a vote," said Indra. "If a majority wish to follow through with Mohan's plan, then the IFA will see it done. Who is opposed?"

We looked around at each other. Aware of the weight of this decision, all were reluctant. I had expected Sachindranath to cast his vote immediately, but it appeared as though he was more concerned with our votes than his own. Then, slowly, Bashir raised his hand.

"My loyalty is to the Association, and I do not believe this would be best for us," said my closest companion, "but, if I am out-voted, then I will follow the rest of you without hesitation."

Sachindranath then raised his own hand, and the two of them looked, in anticipation, to Indra and myself. Though Indra had called the meeting, it was still unclear to the rest of us where he aligned. Surely, he had invested too much into the IFA to put its entire future on the line. But Indra did not raise his hand. He asked those in favour of the assassination of Lord Irwin to raise their hands and, without hesitation, Mohan indicated his support. There was a brief moment, and Indra followed suit.

The air left the room; not one of us drew breath. I was now the centre of attention, and I could feel the full weight of our fates on my shoulders. I wished I had been quicker to make up my mind, for now—though my vote counted no more nor less than that of anyone else in the room—I had become responsible for the lives of each of our comrades. The look on Bashir's face appeared to be pleading with me; Sachindranath harshly glared. With a rush of adrenaline—overwhelmed with a sense of autonomy and meaning—I raised my hand in favour.

The Indian Freedom Association was swiftly set to work with a spirit and drive unlike anything we had ever known. There was a perceptible fear amongst our ranks, but Bashir dawned a facade of full support to present a united front to the others. Though we, too, were afraid of the risk we were taking, our front of confidence calmed the nerves of our comrades. Sachindranath did not abandon us altogether, but his appearances became less frequent as, unlike Bashir, he had not been able to offer his blessing.

The six days that Mohan had told us would be enough time to plan slipped by with horrific speed. Indra, with as much discretion as he could afford, reached out to his various connections to learn as much as he could about the details of the viceroy's arrival. Nearly every member of the IFA became involved to some degree, as we arranged for informants and lookouts to assist us before and during the conspiracy, as well as a number of safehouses that we would attempt to escape to in the aftermath. Mohan took charge of organising those of us who would directly participate in the assassination. In total, ten of us would be armed: Bashir, Kapil, Jagdev, and myself would be armed with only our revolvers, while Indra, Mohan, and Gupteshwar would carry small bombs as well. Mohan also selected Jama and Mohammed—two of the older Muslims—and Kalicharan—the head of one of the Bengali homes, with whom Naren had lived since his paralysation—to accompany us with revolvers of their own.

As the date of the Viceroy's arrival rapidly drew near, we learned of the exact time his train was expected to appear. We had a rough understanding of the escort he would be expected to travel with, as well as the additional security that would meet him at the station. Our safest

option would be for a lone assassin, with either a gun or a bomb, to carefully move themselves into range of the Viceroy, but we decided against this for several reasons. Firstly, though we acknowledged and accepted the great risk which we were all taking, we had no intention of sacrificing one of us without hope of survival; had we sent a single killer, they would be hopelessly vulnerable to the viceroy's guards after performing the assassination. Additionally, it was a priority to avoid any casualties among innocent bystanders. The plan, then, was for Jama to fire his pistol in the air as soon as the viceroy was a substantial distance from the train. This would, of course, alert the security to our intentions and make the plot ever more unlikely to succeed; however, we hoped that the shot would be enough to scare any unfortunate civilians into seeking either cover or an escape.

With the viceroy's security wise to our scheme, we would be forced into a scrimish. It would, then, be up to Indra, Mohan, and Gupteshwar to successfully lob one of the three explosives into Lord Irwin's proximity. From that point—if we managed to make it so far—the plan was quite loose (had Sachindranath been involved, it would have given him a heart attack). We had a number of paths back to the various safehouses mapped out and memorised, and we all walked them through in preparation, but it would be each of our own responsibilities to escape the ensuing pursuit. Our best hope was that the bombs would create enough confusion to draw attention away from our retreat, but I do not believe that any one of us expected everyone to leave this battle unharmed.

For as terrifying as our endeavour was, I was excited. My anticipation grew as each day ticked by. We were on the verge of becoming true contributors to the independence movement; one step closer to avenging the victims that had compiled every year that we did not take action. We had never had any real use for the weapons we had acquired. We took them with us

whenever we had to meet with other revolutionary groups, and in our smuggling and distribution endeavours; but this would be the first time that force and violence were our intentions. A great deal of our munitions were faulty or unreliable, but we were sure to take only our best guns and rounds. We had just enough revolvers for each of us to carry, and the three bomb-throwers selected the most recently constructed explosives.

On the morning of the viceroy's arrival, we anxiously waited in a number of locations. Bashir and I had spent the night in Moolmati's basement, but had woken even before dawn. Neither of us were in the mood to speak, but I do not think that we were as afraid as one might have assumed. I could sense that Bashir, like me, had been given new life by this righteous enterprise, despite his original reservations

As we drew closer to the pivotal hour, the sound of a creaking door and footsteps above us shattered our tense silence. We both reached for and clenched our revolvers. Holding our breaths, we did not take our eyes off of the stairs, awaiting the source of the noise. To our great relief, the figure of one of our young Bengali comrades emerged from the shadows. He, with four others, had been sent early in the morning to watch the train station for any unusual activity that would jeopardise our mission. As he had nothing to report, the surrealness of what was now unfolding engulfed me. There was now nothing in our way; it was a straight, unimpeded, path to the finish line; God had blessed our conspiracy.

There were many people at the train station; I subtly scanned the crowd in an attempt to find my comrades. I located Indra without much difficulty, as he protruded from the masses thanks to his height. Jama was with him, and I saw Mohan with Jagdev not too far from them. I could not make out Kalicharan and Mohammed, nor Gupteshwar and Kapil (we had each been assigned partners), but I had faith that they were somewheres within the station. I also picked up

on at least three policemen in our premises, but had no reason to feel as though they had any cause for suspicion.

My feet felt the vibration of the coming train. My palms were sweaty and my eyes began to dart around in paranoia. As we had expected, a small contingent of armed men had arrived to meet the Viceroy on the platform but, still, there was no sign of danger. Indra looked to be engaged in a casual conversation with Jama, unaffected by nerves as usual. I looked over to Bashir to mimic our stoic leader, in hopes of calming myself, but was interrupted as the train finally pulled up to the platform. Bashir saw that I had turned to him, and touched my shoulder in reassurance.

Passengers began to disembark from the train but, for many agonising minutes, the viceroy did not show. I am not sure how long we waited, but at the time it was an eternal moment. Then, with my heart skipping more beats than was healthy, a company of armed and uniformed men exited the car closest to Mohan and Jagdev. Without thinking, my hand gravitated to my revolver—concealed in the folds of my clothing—but the ever-composed Bashir stayed my arm. Surrounded by these guards, a notably tall Englishman emerged from the car. Unmistakably, Lord Irwin stepped foot into Amritsar.

I watched Jama and Indra; awaiting the former's signal shot. It was important that the shot was not premature—as to avoid the viceroy's retreat back onto the train—but, also, that it was not so late that the viceroy could immediately escape off of the platform and into the station. The viceroy's guards were loud and dictatorial; brandishing their lathis and commanding those around them to move out the way. However, the procession moved at an oddly slow pace, barely making it even five steps from the train car after a minute of exiting. My intuition told me that

something strange was afoot, but still, it did not seem as though anyone had noticed my comrades nor myself.

The viceroy took a couple more steps when, to my alarm, the crack of a revolver rang throughout the platform. My head twisted in the direction of the shot; indeed, Jama's arm was raised in the air holding his smoking gun. The cries of terror were instantaneous. I was nearly slammed to the floor as those around me either dropped, with their hands over their heads, or took off towards the nearest exit. Bashir grabbed me so that I would not be trampled, and we both drew our weapons. But the ensuing clamour was not only made up of screams: more gunshots ripped through the air from every direction. I scanned the platform to see additional police officers whom I had not noticed before. From the other train cars, more uniformed men sallied out; others pointed guns out from the train's windows. There were now weapons being fired from all sides.

Our opportunity to kill the viceroy was gone in an instant; it was not two seconds after Jama's shot that Lord Irwin's escort had rushed him back onto the train. They had used their bodies to shield him, and one had been shot by either Mohan or Jagdev. But the duo, who had not been more than 5 metres away from the Viceroy, were immediately showered in returning fire. Neither the soldiers from the train, nor the police who had taken our rear, showed a fraction of the concern for the civilians that we had integrated into our plan. Anyone who had lagged behind became collateral damage; the men and women around Mohan and Jagdev were caught with stray bullets. Jagdev was killed in an instant, and Mohan fell to the floor with multiple wounds. He dropped his revolver and frantically procured his bomb. As his body absorbed additional bullets, he weakly threw the explosive in front of the train door which the viceroy had been shuffled through. I ducked and covered my head, but the bomb did not detonate.

I regained my composure and fired my revolver in the direction of the viceroy's car. I watched in horror as Indra and Jama were shot down, even before Indra could throw his bomb. Over my shoulder, Bashir shouted in agony. I turned to see my friend's bleeding body sprawled out on the floor. I fell to him and shook his shoulders, but he did not respond to my cries. Before I could respond, a great blast nearly burst my ears and I threw my arms over my head as the gunshots temporarily ceased. Looking up, I made out that Gupteshwar's bomb had detonated a short distance from the viceroy's car. Kapil had already been gunned down and, after the authorities recollected themselves, a rifle from one of the train's windows slew Gupteshwar as well.

I was not defeated. In the direction of where I had seen Indra and Jama fall, I crawled over the lifeless bodies that had been caught in the crossfire. Though most of my comrades had now been slain, the bullets still continued to fly overhead. From where I had thought I had witnessed Indra and Jama's deaths, I could hear that one of them was still returning fire from the floor. There was also a commotion on the far end of the platform, leading me to infer that Kalicharan and Mohammed had been some distance away when the skirmish began.

A bloodied Indra saw my approach. Jama's body was riddled with bullet holes; one having passed through his skull. As I dragged myself next to Indra—using Jama as cover—he stopped firing and dug through his bloodied pockets. He pulled out his bomb and winced as another bullet struck him in the leg.

Through gritted teeth, Indra pressed the bomb into my hand and reminded me, "You cannot die. Revolutionaries do not die."

I watched, then, my shepard and my mentor fade away; and still, I was not defeated. Indra had led me to that moment and, in departure, he had directed me to great purpose. Mohan,

Gupteshwar, my dear Bashir, we had placed in our valiant captain's hands our unwavering faith that we might give ourselves to our nation; and he had delivered. How could I be discouraged knowing that, in martyrdom, I would only return—a revolutionary—in my next life? In my grasp was not a weapon, but the key to my people's dignity and peace. I was still unscathed; our mission had not yet failed. But I would not make the same mistake as Gupteshwar. This final bomb would not fall short.

I rose to a knee and emptied my revolver of its last rounds. I could not escape my fate, but escape was not in my mind. With a cry of "Vande Mataram!" I sprinted with my remaining strength towards the viceroy's car. I had not covered much ground when the first bullet struck me; it was not a second later that I was hit again. But, as I forced my body to continue forwards, I did not think of fear, nor pain, nor danger. I felt only pride and closure, knowing that I was now, for the first time, rejecting the intolerable. And though—at the fringes of my consciousness—I also felt regret as I detonated Indra's bomb, it was not for my failure to reach the train, but for all of the wasted years in which I had conflated cowardice with patience. As the explosion engulfed me, my past foolishness was redeemed.

8

"That was an impressively detailed story," said Hasan, who had listened, without interrupting, with genuine interest.

"I am glad to have someone who appreciates it," Jathai replied.

"Impressive for a lie, that is. Unless I truly am in the presence of an apparition."

"Indeed, Sachindranath has embellished a good deal of my life; but I take responsibility for the crimes attributed to me, nonetheless. For much of my story is true, and I have lived many years in shame for the things that I *have* done. What was more was the shame I long endured for the things I *wished* I had done; the crimes that I came so terribly close to committing.

"But no. I am not Jathai, hero of the revolution, ghost of Amritsar; I am Jathai, the coward. My contributions to my nation were cut short by my conscience; I was not strong enough to join Bashir and Indra in their honour. I did not even kill that English soldier. I did not use a revolver. I did not throw a bomb. At every opportunity to fight for justice—to fight for Aryavarta—I hesitated. For all my malice, for every reason I had to despise the Raj, my heart would not let me follow my comrades on their path of violence."

It seemed, to Hasan, that every word that came from the prisoner's mouth in explanation, warranted a dozen new questions. Hasan was lost in a maze of deception, the boundaries of which he could not make out. He had only allowed Jathai to deliver his story out of curiosity; he had thought that the prisoner's elaboration would provide clarity and answers. But now, Hasan was left knowing nothing of either the things Jathai had done or who Jathai was. He stood up and

paced in front of the table that separated them. Hasan raised his hands and looked around the room, as though he no longer knew where he was.

"What, then, would you have me believe we are doing in this room?" Hasan asked, having abandoned any patience. His voice became harsh and pointed. "This is not Amritsar, Jathai! This place is not your home! You are in Kashmir; you have come here of your own volition. Would you have me believe that you are some sort of pacifist? That you have stumbled into this place by chance? You are a killer; a violent and radical man, no different than myself! I know why you have come to Kashmir, I know the people you are with, and I know the things you have all done to the Muslims of this province. You may tell me that the stories about you are all false, and of how harmless and innocent you truly are. You may profess your love of Gandhi, claim to be a satyagrahi, for all I care. Go on and tell me about your father and his worship of Jinnah; it does not matter to me. You will not win my sympathy. It is all an illusion; I may not know about your past, but I know who you have become in Kashmir!"

Jathai, to his captor's unnerving, was unphased by this berating. The accusations had no effect on his calm and accepting disposition. Hasan had hoped to expose his prisoner's ruse. He had thought that, having realised that no pity would be offered, the liar would panic and plead for mercy or forgiveness. But Jathai only listened, unmoving, keeping a disturbing eye contact with Hasan.

"I am not looking for your sympathy, Hasan," said Jathai. "I do not deserve it. If it is easier for you to believe that I was the man that Sachindranath has contrived, then believe that; but, whether or not it is convenient to you, it is not the truth. Whether by fear or strength, I did not raise my hand against the Raj. At the time, I told myself that it was the latter; for what could take more strength than to show restraint in the face of such unmistakable depravity?

"What I have told you about poor Naren is all true. Mohan did take an English soldier hostage. I did stand in the presence of that soldier, knife in hand. And every feeling was the same; I have never been so repulsed, so enraged, by the sight of another human being. He was the Raj, to me. He was one of the men who had crippled Naren; he was one of the officers responsible for my mother's execution. I delivered my monologue and, in my hand, I had the power to deliver justice."

"But you did not?" asked Hasan.

"I did not."

"Why?" Hasan inquired incredulously, his voice raised. "Why, Jathai? Why show mercy to this tyrant—this animal? How could you—you, who has come to Kashmir to spill blood for nation and religion—how could you stay your hand against the enemy responsible for all of this violence?"

"Because I was not yet the man who sits in front of you today. Because I had faith in Truth, and in compassion. Observing that defenceless soldier, I did not see the progenitor of our suffering; I saw a human being, no more in control of his life than we were of our governance. It was too easy—needing neither strength nor thought—for me to take his life. But to spare him—to fight every instinct and passion in my being—was a real choice. In that moment, my will was not dictated by the Raj; I experienced true, substantive, free will.

"And as I contemplated my options, the cynicism of Mrs. Blair did fan the flames in my heart. A puppet, she would have called me; a pawn, being used to entertain the Empire in its heedless and unperturbed game. For neither choice would have mattered. Whether a murderer or a saviour, to the Raj, I would remain a faceless resource. And whether this soldier lived, or died

and was replaced by some other expendable body, his purpose and his orders would be carried through.

"But, in truth, it was not Mrs. Blair who defined my years in London. The hopelessness and vindictiveness that she inspired in me was not what determined my identity. It was the docile and warmhearted Mr. Wood who prevailed in my times of inner-turmoil. Indeed, I would not have even met that blunt old woman had it not been for Mr. Wood's sympathy for India's plight. And, for much of my youth, I nurtured a dream in which our people would stand, hand in hand, with men like Mr. Wood, as equals. I believed that people—good, decent, humans—like Mr. Wood would deliver, to us, our independence; but only if we had faith that such men existed, and only if we worked together.

"It was only a matter of time until England, I thought, granted us our freedom. And in this freedom, I believed that India would prosper. No one else needed to feel the pain I had felt when my mother was taken from me; I did not want my father to relive that nightmare just so that I could needlessly throw away my life to feel fulfilled and relevant. We could share this future, I thought; Bashir and I, and even Indra, Gupteshwar, and Mohan."

"You would have shared that future with Mohan?" Hasan scoffed.

"It was not a lie when I said that I had eaten from the same plate as my old friend. Mohan was no less my brother than any of the Arya Samajis. But Mohan had greater foresight than myself; he knew the reality of our peoples. I think he anticipated the Partition, and the grief that would come with it, long before the rest of us. He was never, perhaps, fighting for the independence of India, but for Pakistan the entire time."

"How am I to digest your story? You claim that your Bengali friend has constructed this narrative, yet you say that some of its parts are true."

"If not for a handful of defining moments," Jathai answered, "I would take ownership of the entire fiction. It is because my true past was so close to unfolding as Sachindranath depicted, that I have never fought the implicating details. For I did lose my mother at the Jallianwala Bagh, and I was filled with a lust for the blood of the Raj; I did journey to London, where the company of Bashir, Mr. Wood, and Mrs. Blair did cultivate me into a nationalist; I did join the Arya Samaj, where I became acquainted with the leaders of the Indian Freedom Association; and I did call these men my comrades, even when they abducted an innocent Englishman.

"My love for my comrades was no less true than I have said. It was not until Mohan and the Sikhs took their prisoner that reality broke from the story. By that time, I had become well liked and respected among my comrades, and had contributed much to the IFA. So, Indra allowed me to speak with the soldier alone; and, just as I said, I did hide a knife in my sleeve.

"With the door shut behind me, I paced around the room for several minutes; for I was waging an internal war. I placed my knife on the table in front of him, still unsure of what I planned on doing. Indra would kill this man, I knew, even if I spared him. But as I debated upon my options, I realised the absurdity of my situation. There I was, with a human being's life in my hands, contemplating this man's entire future. And yet, I did not know him; the only thing I knew about him was enough to determine that I hated him. To me, he could represent nothing more than the Raj, for I had nothing else to judge him by.

"I ranted to the helpless captive, though I am not sure he listened to very much of what I said. But a detail that Sachindranath conveniently left out from his story—and I do not know what compelled me to do it—was that, after I had spoken, I reached across the table and lifted the bag that covered the soldier's face. Of course, he immediately looked terrified; but I saw this terror exponentially increase as he came to the realisation of what I had just done. He must have

believed that I had doomed him. For I had implicated myself; he saw my face and—for what it was worth—he saw the room we were holding him in. I let him struggle against his restraints and plead through his gag. I still did not know what I wanted to do.

"General Dyer must have felt what I felt, then, with that pitiful and defenceless wreck in my presence. I almost sympathised with the brute, Dyer; to have so much power over human life without fear of consequence. Surely, I thought to myself, our fates had already been set in stone. Whether this man died or not, the authorities would search for whoever had captured him, and—if we were discovered—there was no doubt that we would be hanged. So this responsibility was not mine; I could not possibly worsen our situation by taking his life. *Why should I not be the one to kill him*, I wondered. *Who has more cause?* No one could have hated the Raj more than me. No one could have been more satisfied by the revenge that I had direct access to.

"But, as I did not kill him right away, the soldier's breathing relaxed. His widened eyes focused on my own. Perhaps he, too, was unsure of my next decision. He stopped trying to mumble through the gag—not that I had been able to discern anything he had attempted to say—and, instead, he began to bargain through his expression alone. I remember how he barely, and slowly, shook his head, as if he believed that he could appeal to my humanity. But his helplessness—his pathetic desperation—only fuelled my anger. The Raj would not have hesitated. The Raj would not have even cared enough to take off the blindfold and look at the human in front of them. The Raj did not know clemency. But still, that man—who was, in my eyes, the Raj itself—would ask me to show mercy.

"This would be the moment, I knew, that defined my very being. To make my next move, I knew that I would need to determine everything I believed about my nation and its oppressor. *A boy has been paralysed*, I finally spoke, *by one of you. Do you understand this? Do you*

understand the suffering that has been caused? I know that you are not the one who has done this, but you are responsible nonetheless. I have more reason than you could possibly know to kill you; and it would be a fitting end to a servant of the Raj. For as long as you have been in this country, you have put men like me in the same position that you now find yourself in. And you do not forgive men like me. Now, for the first time in my life, I know what it is to wield that kind of power. You have held the people of India hostage; and now, I—as the arbiter of these people—hold your life in my hands.

"I put the bag back over his head, I took the knife back into my hand. He began to fight his restraints again, and his horrific wailing recommenced. I could feel the full weight of the choice I was then confronting and, while studying the blade, I said: *But if I fulfil my heart's desire, if I do to you what you would do to me, how can I condemn you? If I am to choose to fight injustice with injustice, I do not know what purpose I serve.* The Englishman fell silent once again and, with my blade, I cut the ropes that tied him to his chair. Out the cellar door—to evade Indra and the others—I led him to safety."

As Jathai described what had truly happened, Hasan's eyes had transfixed themselves upon the long knife that he had placed on the table that separated them; stunned by what he was hearing, his mouth hung slightly open. He was more shocked to learn that Jathai had saved the soldier's life than he had been when he was told that Jathai had murdered the man in cold blood.

"But how could you release him?" Hasan asked. "Surely, you could not have freed this man without exposing yourself and all of your comrades. He saw your face, and he must have seen where your lair was."

"It was a risk that I dreaded," responded Jathai, "but one that I forced myself to overcome. I did my best to protect the IFA; I kept the blindfold over his head, and led him as

carefully as I could back to the city. It was still dark outside, so I succeeded in moving him without being seen. He seemed to be aware of the graciousness of what I had done—as well as the knife I still had, pressed against his back—and so, he did not struggle or make any noise as we crept through the night.

"I never saw that soldier again; and I never heard anything about him either. I do not know if he tried to track us down—to bring the wrath of the Raj upon us—or if he chose to forget what had happened to him that day. For weeks I thought about how I looked into his blue eyes; how he must have remembered my face, just as I remember his. Perhaps he did not have enough information to find for us, but I try to tell myself that my mercy affected him."

"But how could you spare this imperialist?" Hasan pleaded for an answer. "How could you extend your grace to a man like that, but bring such violence to Kashmir? How could you spare an Englishman, but not those with whom you once called your comrades?"

"It has been many years since I saved that man, Hasan." Jathai replied, somberly. "I have witnessed realities that my younger self was fortunate enough to be naive to. Indeed, if I were to relive that night—knowing what I now know and having seen the things I have now seen—I cannot say that I would have made the same choice. If I were in your position, and to pick up the blade in between us, I cannot say that it would be used in the same manner."

9

I knew the consequences of my choice before I made it, but it still pained me to face the heartbreaking disappointment of my comrades. They did not have any option other than to entirely ostracise me from the Indian Freedom Association. Though I had blatantly betrayed their trust, none of them showed any animosity towards me, as they were mostly hurt by my disloyalty. Of course, in my mind, I had not been disloyal at all; I had done all I could do to uphold the integrity of our movement, and to protect the righteousness of my comrades' souls. But I understood that they could never see this, and I did not contest their decision to cast me away.

Bashir was the most sympathetic to me, but also the most distraught. I think that a part of him recognized my intentions, though he struggled with my apparent willingness to jeopardise our friendship. For we had spent nearly every day together, since joining the IFA, with the revolution giving us cause to enjoy each other's company. My departure from the IFA did not mark the end of our relationship, but—as we both feared—it greatly reduced the frequency with which we met. I drifted apart from my comrades, who had become my closest companions, and was drawn back towards the life of seclusion that had defined the years preceding my time in London.

My father, on the other hand, was more than delighted with me spending more time at home. We had never directly spoken about what I had been involved with, but he was not a stupid man. My ostracisation from the IFA brought a new vitality to him; he was happier and more conversational. He was content to pretend as though the past years had never happened,

and he opened his arms to me with a position as a court clerk. It eased my heart to know that my expulsion from my comrades had, at least, brough my father joy.

I had thought about returning to my pursuit of a career as a lawyer or, eventually, a judge, but the time I had spent in the revolution had displaced me from that trajectory. In retrospect, I do not suppose it was anything more than a mental roadblock; I was subconsciously punishing myself for the guilt I felt in abandoning my comrades. For years, despite my father's occasional encouragement, I never made any attempt to advance my position or better my future. The ideal which had driven me to spare that soldier—that we could work with the Raj to earn our independence—never manifested itself within my conduct. It was not long after I left the IFA, after everything I had grown used to vanished from my life, that I began to question whether or not I even believed in that ideal.

Though we both knew that I could never fully regain the trust of Indra (and especially of Sachindranath and Mohan), Bashir also implored me to think about my potential in the courts. A well respected lawyer—let alone a judge—with sympathies to the revolution would be an invaluable asset. And still, I could not motivate myself. Some part of me had been convinced that, again, I would only hurt or disappoint those who meant so much to me. Furthermore, I still harboured the same reluctance towards violence that had been a factor in my release of our hostage, and I was petrified by the idea that I might enable my former comrades to follow that dangerous and slippery path.

This was a fear that I carried for the entirety of this stagnant stretch of my life. The validity of my concern was revealed to me when, through my periodic encounters with Bashir, I became aware of a reckless and radical conspiracy. It was a plot to assassinate the governor-general; an unhinged abandonment of any kind of restraint. It was such a colossal task that Indra

had become a bit desperate for aid. Not everyone in the IFA had been willing to participate (Bashir alluded to me that Sachindranath had distanced himself from the others for the time being). Bashir was not particularly warm to the conspiracy, but was committed to seeing it through. Indra was not so desperate as to invite me back to the Association, but I had gotten the feeling that Bashir—on his leader's behalf—was investigating my potential support. Perhaps they would have used me as a lookout, or to acquire some sort of inside information from within the courts, or to use my father's home to hide the fugitives after the attack.

I was adamantly unwilling to offer my services. I had not been able to execute that soldier, and I would not be able to aid the murder of the most powerful man in India. Indeed, I tried to dissuade Bashir from joining the others. I had hoped that I could get him to see the impossibility of their mission, like the cunning Sachindranath. But any effort I made was in vain; Bashir was not one to do away with his principles lightly. A part of me wishes I had been more forceful; more convincing. For I knew that, however this affair ended, the result would not be in my dear friend's favour. I knew that my former comrades—despite their spirit, experience, and zeal—could never overcome the full force of the British Raj. But, as per usual, I did not do enough to save my friends.

It was a week of fearful anticipation. I could not monitor their progress, nor predict their actions. I did not know if they were confident or doubtful. To add to my consternation, I did not even know what day the plot would unfold. All I could do was wait, each day, on edge. My father noticed my distress, but did not prod. But as the days passed, and my anxiety swelled, I never got word of anything related to an assassination. Nothing of terrorists or the revolution came to the public light; no news of the viceroy's death, or even of a threat to his life, surfaced.

And as the time since I had last met Bashir was stretched out, it was as though my friends had disappeared from Amritsar.

Instead of hearing about the success or failure of the IFA's scheme, I was arrested. It happened early in the morning, before my father and I had prepared for the day. There was a call at the door, to which one of the servants investigated. I heard a commotion, and suddenly a party of policemen had pushed their way into the dining room where I had been eating my breakfast. At first, I thought to resist, but as they grabbed my arms and barked orders at my father and the servants, I complied with their commands. My father furiously protested; he shouted at the police, reminding them of who he was and demanding to know what I had done. To both of our dismays—for I, too, was unsure of the crime I had committed—they offered no explanation.

I was taken to the jail—a prisoner without knowledge of my own offence—and put into a small and dark cell. I do not know why the discovery of my cellmate surprised me; in retrospect, there was no other explanation for this robbery of my rights and freedom. Awaiting me in our cage was Indra. He embraced me with apologies—almost weeping—as though we had never been apart. It was the first time I had seen him since my excommunication, and he was no different than he had been when I last set eyes upon him. He was a little dehydrated, was my only thought.

He finally delivered the explanation that I had been deprived of: the day before, Indra and the majority of the IFA had been seized by the police. It had been the day of Lord Irwin's arrival in Amritsar; the day that Indra and the others had planned to murder the viceroy. But their plan had been foiled before they could even depart for the train station. Indra told me that he had been separated from the others, and that he knew neither how many arrests had been made nor where our friends were being held. Bashir, he could confirm, had been one of those arrested.

In our cell, Indra was much more quiet than I had remembered him to be (almost entirely silent). He could not look at me without being overcome with guilt. When our gazes met, he would writhe and turn away—not in disgust—but in shame.

"You should not have been dragged into this regrettable affair," Indra told me. "You chose to avoid our self-destruction, and yet, you have been caught in the outcome of our foolishness. Anything I can do to win your release, I will do. I promise you this."

"But what do they know?" I asked, uninterested in sentiments. "If these arrests are only because of the Association, there may be some hope in our defence; but if they know about the plot… do not tell me, Indra, that they have uncovered your plan."

Whether he did not know, or could not bear to tell me, Indra had no answer. It certainly seemed likely, to the both of us, that the timing of the arrests had been more than a coincidence. But to accept that the police had known about the plan to assassinate Lord Irwin, would be to accept our executions. We had to maintain faith. Regardless, it was next to impossible for the two of us to learn more about our situation, as our communication with both the other revolutionaries and our friends on the outside was tightly restricted. For the first week of our detainment, we did not have any contact with the other prisoners.

The day after my arrival, Indra took it upon himself to protest our isolation. He denied the scarce and unfit food provided to us by the guards, and only, rarely, consumed a little water each day. On the second day of Indra's hunger strike—though he urged me to prioritise myself—I joined him in his protest. By the fourth day that Indra had rejected any sustenance, his body had visibly changed. The skin on his face was tighter and his eyes were shallow. He was noticeably thinner too, though he was an especially muscular man and still did not look too skeletal. I, on

the other hand, had begun my strike with a much less substantial frame; and my body was concerning to look at, even though I had begun a day after Indra.

The guards had hoped that we would give up on our protest; but six days had passed since Indra last ate, and he seemed no less resolved. At first they became more forceful; the food they gave us was presented as an order, rather than an option. When it became clear that we would not break, the guards were left without a choice. I have never been more disturbed than I was when I watched these men force a funnel down the throat of my former leader. Six guards squeezed themselves into our compact cell; four of them latched onto Indra's squirming limbs. The other two forced some kind of stew or curry down his throat. I can still remember the noises that Indra made. At first he maintained what composure he could, but as the tube was roughly forced into his throat and he struggled to breathe, he emitted a painful, choking screech.

When they were finished, Indra was carelessly pushed to the side. He laid with little movement for some time. He hid his face, but I thought I heard him crying. He had been totally broken. Fortunately, the guards had not immediately turned to me, afterwards; they left us in our cell and, a few hours later, we were offered food once again. Neither Indra nor myself saw the point in subjecting ourselves to that torture, and so we acquiesced.

But we had not wholly failed in our protest. We were soon released from our seclusion into a larger, communal, cell. We were received by over twenty members of the IFA, including Gupteshwar, Mohan, and Bashir. Sachindranath, despite his best efforts to avoid association with the assassination attempt, had been detained as well. Seeing the Bengali gave me some hope, as I thought that it might have indicated that the arrests were unrelated to the conspiracy against Lord Irwin's life. But I was most comforted by seeing Bashir unharmed.

The others had also been separated for most of their time in the jail. Now that we were finally reunited, however, the same camaraderie that had defined the IFA appeared to have dissolved. The Sikhs largely kept to themselves, and the other members broke into Bengali and Punjabi factions. Within each of those factions, of course, there was a natural rift between the Hindus and the Muslims. I was stunned by the development, as we had once been brothers to one another. Yet, in the confines of our prison, these brothers of mine devolved into a competitive self-reliance. The gravity of our situation was understood. We were like scared children; each of us were only concerned about our own survival. Indra was heartbroken by what was unfolding in front of him, and in little time he isolated himself once again, dejected and depressed.

With Indra's reservation, Mohan became the de facto leader of the Punjabis. He would often scowl in the direction of Sachindranath and the Bengalis (according to Bashir, their animosity had originated with Sachindranath denouncing Mohan's conspiracy against Lord Irwin). But the extent of our internal friction was limited by the ambiguity of our detainment; we still did not know the seriousness of the charges being brought against us. In fact, we still did not know if any charges were being brought at all. None of us expected that the Raj was above imprisoning us, without just cause, for the sake of eliminating any potential threats we might eventually pose.

"For now, we must be as cautious as possible," Mohan said to Bashir and I. "The Bengalis have their own lawyers and their own community to be concerned about. Until we know what we are facing, we must look after our own."

There was some hope that, once we were finally informed of some formal accusation, we might have something to unite against. But when—almost two weeks after the first arrests—the facts of our predicament began to be revealed, I do not think that any other revelation could have

been more detrimental to the spirit of the IFA. The whole time that we had been in that jail, the authorities had been diligently building a case to obliterate every trace of the revolution in Amritsar. To this day, I have never learned how the police knew to arrest us before the assassination attempt; but I do know how they acquired the evidence needed to implicate the would-be conspirators.

After young Narendranath had been crippled, one of the wealthier and well respected Bengali members took the orphan, permanently, into his home. Kalicharan had a wife and a single child of his own but—according to everything I had heard about his relationship with Naren—he had treated the rascal no differently than his own kin. But Naren's involvement with the IFA had occurred during a very impressionable time in his life; and, perhaps, he had always been more interested in casual acts of dacoity than in any larger, more principled, commitment to the revolution. Anyways, Naren had grown disillusioned not only with the Association, but with life in general. Bashir had once told me that Kalicharan would frequently show concern for the boy; that Naren had become cynical and bitter in his ruined life. But Kalicharan's empathy was never challenged, and his love for the boy was never in question.

Narendranath had known about Mohan's plot, for Kalicharan had continued to treat the boy like a real member of the IFA. He had innocently talked to Naren about most of the Association's actions and plans. I wonder how long it took, when the police had interrogated the boy, for Narendranath to spill every devastating fact he could remember. I bear no malice towards him; he was still so young when these horrible circumstances played out. I suspect that the police had seriously threatened him; convinced him that he was in danger of life-imprisonment, or even execution.

Whatever compelled Narendranath to give up on us, I hope that he was able to live with himself once the consequences were distributed. But not everyone in that jail was as understanding as I was. I thought that the guards might separate us once again, as it had begun to look like the Bengalis and the Punjabis were on the verge of violence. Kalicharan was heartbroken by the betrayal but, still, he defended Narendranath's name against the furious barrage of curses and condemnation. Perhaps the tension did come to a breaking point, but I was not in the jail long enough to witness it.

Our communication with the outside had been restricted long enough for the authorities to plan a focused attack against us. We learned about Narendranath's betrayal when this wall of silence was finally broken and we could correspond with our lawyers and families. My father was quickly granted an audience with me; what strings he had to pull for us to hastily meet, I do not know.

He broke into a flood of tears when he saw me. "I will bring you home, Jathai! I promise that you will come home! They have nothing to prosecute you for—your arrest was more of a precaution than anything else. You are guilty of nothing more than association."

"What of the others?" I replied. "What do they know about my friends? About Bashir?"

"There is nothing we can do for them, Jathai. Your freedom is all that matters now. They know everything they need to know."

I was not so willing as my father to accept the downfall of my comrades: "I will not leave this jail if it means I must abandon these men! You must do everything in your power to protect them. They are heroes! They are good men! Please, father, do not take me from them."

My father was, understandably, taken aback by my loyalty. When the guards came to take me back to the cell, they needed to physically pull him away from me. It must have hurt

him, to hear his only son be so willing to throw his life away for the sake of these criminals. I cannot imagine how it felt for him to know that I was more concerned with my comrades than with ever seeing him again. He must have forgiven me, nevertheless, for he did not comply with my request. His mission to obtain my freedom was not hindered in the slightest.

Sachindranath, too, found himself in a fortunate position. He had, it seemed, been quite successful in keeping a low profile over the years; and, when it mattered most, he had managed to almost entirely clear his name of affiliation with the IFA as the plot against Lord Irwin was formulated. And so, it became common knowledge in the jail that Sachindranath and myself would likely find ourselves on the outside of the jail's walls in the near future: a fact that only further inflamed Mohan's vexation.

"How fitting," he declared, "that you would be cleared of all blame, Sachindranath! You have played a clever game, all these years. No doubt, the rest of us will be sent to our deaths; but the coward, who was no wheres to be found when we needed him most, will escape our fate."

"Do you regret all of these past years?" The room fell silent as a commanding voice filled the air. Indra had risen from the corner that he had relegated himself too. The aura of defeat that had encompassed him, had been cast off. We all looked to him, and he was once again granted the full respect of the entire Association. "Would you all have lived different lives, had you known that this would be our fate? I thought that we had accepted the risks—embraced them, even! It was the risk that sanctified our actions! I have made a fool of myself these past few days, and I hope that you will all accept my deepest regrets. But I will not linger on mistakes; I will choose to remember the great things that we have accomplished. It was not three weeks ago when we were infused with a pure and powerful patriotism. But how quickly that spirit has folded to the pressures of adversity…

“I remember telling you all that revolutionaries do not die; and I remember when you took these words to heart, and used them to give you courage. Now our friends, Sachindranath and Jathai, have been gifted a future; a future in which they may continue our purpose as champions of India. But, though we may be left behind, our utility to the revolution is not at an end. Why do you fear death, my comrades, if revolutionaries do not die? The end of our stories will be the beginning of our greatest contributions to India.”

I tell myself that the comfort Indra brought to my friends lasted until the end. I choose to believe that he inspired them in their darkest time; that they reformed the bond they had shared before the arrests. But I was not there to know if this happened, and my hope may be naive. A part of me stayed behind in that jail, with Bashir. Leaving him was a pain like no other; I would have rather have been gunned down, like in Sachindranath’s story, than to have left him as I did. And the last words he said to me did not comfort me nor lend themselves to the hope I have tried to maintain.

As we embraced for the last time Bashir spoke in my ear, “Powerless, you escape from this bondage; and, powerless, I remain.”

Every year his words haunt me more, for time has only proven them correct. I do not wish to speak anymore about Bashir and my friends’ last days; I do not wish to recall the details of their trial, or their execution. It was a drawn out and brutal process. For nearly a year of my life, I held out on the hope that they might be spared. But, in the end, nineteen of my comrades were sentenced to death; the rest were imprisoned for various lengths of time. Sachindranath and I were the only ones, among the arrested, who walked away. The arrests reunited me with my friends, only to permanently tear them from my life. Gupteshwar, Kapil, Jagdev, Jama,

Mohammed, Kalicharan, Mohan, Indra, and Bashir; all of my brothers were slain for their love of their people and their home.

What of the future Indra spoke of? The future, for Sachindranath and I, in which we might further the Indian Freedom Association's cause? I did not know what happened to Sachindranath after his release. He disappeared without a word to me, though, through rumours, I knew that he remained active in the revolution in the years to come. As for myself, I suppose Indra would have been fairly disappointed. As moving as Indra's leadership had been, the damage I brought to my father's heart, and to his reputation, had a far greater impact on me. We did not need to speak of the harm that I had done for it to be obvious, for—as much as my father tried to conceal the damage—I could not ignore the exhaustion that had been imbued into his ageing soul.

I, of course, did not return to my clerkship, and my father no longer openly discussed his work when he returned home at the end of each day. It was clear to me that his character—that of an honourable and unflappable servant of the law—had been drawn into question by my arrest. He had strained his connections, I was sure, to guarantee my safety. This shame that I brought to my own father spoiled Amritsar to me; I could no longer experience joy in that city. Everywhere I went, and everything I did, if not a reminder of my mother, or of my comrades, was a reminder of the burden I had become for the last person in my life that mattered to me. It was a city of ghosts. I decided that I had to leave Amritsar.

Raghuvir, the longtime friend of Indra, had come to Amritsar to offer any support he could during the trials. He was an affluent landlord from Lahore who managed the vendors in one of the city's Hindu bazaars. The Shah Alami Bazaar, as it was called, had an important role in bringing together Lahore's Hindu community, placing Raghuvir in a position of tremendous influence. But he was never one to abuse, or even relish, power. When I discovered that he was in Amritsar, after my release, I seeked him out. Our meetings continued throughout the trials, and even once the sentences had been ordered. He was, afterall, one of the only remaining figures from my past life.

Raghuvir was a perceptive man, and it was not difficult for him to pick up on the shame this affair had brought me. He tried to ease my mind—he would try to emphasise how much more important I was to my father than his career or reputation—but my distress could not be overcome. There was, however, another element to these trials that even Raghuvir could not ignore. The reputation of my father was one thing, but the dangerous contortion of my own was another.

"I am not sure that your conflict with the Raj will end with these trials," he told me. "I do not know what influence your father still has, but your name will always be associated with this conspiracy against the governor-general. They may not have been able to prosecute you this time, but I am quite sure that you will be closely monitored. If you find yourself in the wrong place, at the wrong time, you may not find the Raj to be so lenient as they have been."

There was no doubt that he was right. For as long as I lived in Amritsar, my freedom would be limited by the watchful eye of the Raj. I was sure that the authorities were not only expecting me to make a mistake, but hoping I would. My concern was not restricted to the possibility of being incidentally associated with a crime—as Raghuvir had put it, being in "the

wrong place, at the wrong time"—rather, I dreaded that I would never be free to intentionally support the independence movement. Even if I were to act as a satyagrahi, or as a lawful voice of nationalism, the target on my back would assure my arrest. And so, the generous Raghuvir offered me an alternative to this life of captivity.

I left my father a note, explaining my departure from Amritsar. I could not bear to face him. In the letter, I apologised for my failures and detailed the reasons as to why I could not remain in our home. I expressed my desire for freedom, but also my regret for the liability I had become. I did not tell him where I was going, or who I was going with, but only that I would be safe. I did not have many possessions to bring with me, and there was no one left in Amritsar for me to say farewell too.

For nearly two decades, I lived in Lahore. I all but abandoned my legal education, fulfilling various clerical and management roles for Raghuvir at the bazaar. He paid me well, and I was given a room in his large home to live in. I had already known his wife, Meera, from the night of Naren's assault. That night had had a profound effect on Raghuvir and Meera, and had marked their disillusionment with the revolution. Like myself, they looked to communal and non-violent means to advance India's independence movement; but, unlike myself, they had actually followed through with these ideals. Meera had founded and managed an all-girls school—which had been exceptionally rare, at the time—which received most of its enrollment from the Hindu families that worked in, and patronised, the Shah Alami Bazaar.

They had three children, the oldest of whom—Bhagwan—was only a few years younger than myself and many years ahead of his siblings. Over the years, Bhagwan and I became close, almost like brothers, and spent most days together. Raghuvir delegated many responsibilities to his son and, because most of my own work had to do with managerial matters, our roles often

overlapped with one another. In keeping records, collecting debts, sending letters, and any other daily task, we were each other's advisors and assistants.

Indeed, no one in my life equaled my friendship with Bashir to the same degree as Bhagwan. I witnessed that man grow into a spectacular human being; I was there for his marriage, for the birth of his first son, and for the birth of his second. Bhagwan would become an admirable father, with many qualities that reminded me of my own. He would sometimes bring his boys along with us to the bazaar, and never failed to answer any questions they had about random products or people that happened to catch their eyes. Bhagwan and his children brought me more peace than they could have known; for, in them, I could once again dream of a better future.

But I have suffered the most unfortunate fate of having been born an Indian under the thumb of the British Raj. It was lucky that a moment of tranquillity, in my turbulent existence, could have lasted as long as it did in Lahore. Within the graciousness of Raghuvir, Meera's school, and Bhagwan's beautiful family, I believed that I had witnessed the path of progress; a path in which injustice and oppression could be resisted. But the oppression of the British Raj was a subtle one. It was not bold or apparent.

There was always a tension between the religions of India; but it was once limited enough to trick us into believing that we might be one in the same. Hindus and Muslims; two sides of one coin. We were led to believe that we were Indians first, all of whom suffered under the tyranny of a single enemy. But when the rumours began to circulate—that this enemy of ours might relinquish its ultimate power—we began to face the ugly truths about our history and, more importantly, our future.

There was violence, and there were threats, and we grew to accept these disruptions as normal. There were many Hindus in Lahore before the Partition, and even some Sikhs, but it was a Muslim city. There were enough of us to avoid total marginalisation, and cultural hubs like the Shah Alami Bazaar served as the glue which held our communities together. Unfortunately, when a community is targeted for eradication, it is the glue that must first go. And so, for many years, we dealt with isolated threats and vandalism. For a while, there was little method to this madness but, as we drew closer to the present day, these acts transformed from dacoity to organised violence.

It did not begin in 1940, when Jinnah and the League delivered the Lahore Resolution. The Resolution had not been a cause, but an effect; the Muslims had been exhausted with attempting to reconcile themselves with the other religions of India long before their formal commitment to a separate state. I know this because I experienced it; I saw the intolerance, the emotions, the flames, much earlier than 1940. Meera received the worst of it. She had poured her heart and soul into her school. Through the tools needed to uplift their community—the way Meera uplifted us—the school had given the Hindu girls reason to look to the future with hope. They learned to read and write, they learned some history and literature, and they often studied the Vedas and the Upanishads. But, if Lahore was to be a Muslim city, this Hindu girls school could never last.

Meera was a realist, and the opposition that her institution received did not phase her. She had always anticipated the backlash. Bhagwan, however, could be a passionate and emotional man. When Meera's school was broken into at night, and when she and her students would be harassed in the streets, Bhagwan would swear that he would find the perpetrators and bring them to justice. Had it not been for the wise influence of Raghuvir and Meera, I am sure that Bhagwan

would have engaged in many acts of reckless retaliation (and I would have likely been dragged along). But if we had known how drastically these acts of discrimination would escalate in the coming years, I imagine we would have been—like Bhagwan's parents—much more reserved.

There are two sides to every story, and this was no less true of the religious violence that permeated throughout Lahore during the waning years of the British Raj. The brawls—and the deaths—that would sporadically interrupt life in Lahore were as likely to have been initiated by a Hindu than a Muslim. In reverence of the good Raghuvir, Bhagwan and I restrained ourselves from joining the ranks of these provocateurs. But the effects of violence are not limited to those directly involved; and our responsibilities in the Shah Alami Bazaar forced us to contend with the many horrors of the Partition.

Bhagwan, and wife and sons, lived on the opposite end of the—mostly Hindu—residential district that Raghuvir, Meera, and myself occupied. Nevertheless, in the summer of 1946, we would recall hearing and seeing the same commotions. There were nights when chants of "Vande Mataram" rang throughout the whole district, and war-like cries were used to spur the pride of the Hindus. There were gunshots, too; and the wailing of riots and the explosions of bombs. During the worst nights, I would stay up with Raghuvir and Meera to comfort—and, if need be, protect—their younger children. Raghuvir and I began to carry revolvers, as if we had been flung back into the height of the revolution. The closer we drew to the end of the Raj, the greater the casualties became each day. Buildings and homes were burned, rioters were beaten and stampeded, random victims were murdered, and shops in the bazaars were forced to close.

That summer, Raghuvir handed me a letter that had been addressed to me. I froze upon reading it; the letter had pulled me back into a past that I had not wished to relive. It read:

Jathai,

I pray that this letter has reached you before it is too late. You must leave Lahore. Perhaps you have already deciphered this yourself, but I must impress upon you the importance of your haste and urgency. No doubt, you have witnessed the signs, and I can assure you that it will not be long until every Hindu in your city is at terrible risk. If you come back to Amritsar, you may look for me at the Arya Samaj. If I am not there, someone will tell you where to find me. I will be leaving Amritsar, within the next couple of months, and travelling with some like-minded men to attempt to assuage this inevitable violence that has plagued our nation. I hope you will join us. Implore Raghuvir to save himself and his family; there will be little time.

Sachindranath.

What was I to make of this letter? Sachindranath was right, of course, in that we had long discussed the quickly approaching necessity of relocation. I was a little surprised, and a little touched, by the concern my old comrade still had for me. We had not seen each other once, in almost two decades, since we had been freed from the jail in Amritsar. Still, I had known that Sachindranath had not forgotten me; some years back, Raghuvir had mentioned that rumours had been spread. Rumours that involved me and my life. Young revolutionaries—those whom I had never met—had been fed lies about the Indian Freedom Association and a particularly patriotic freedom fighter who happened to share my name. Both Raghuvir and I knew that Sachindranath

had been responsible for these tall tales; for the Bengali and I were the only living members who had known, with such detail, about the Association.

But I did not fight these rumours. I made no effort to clear my name or set the record straight. I had separated myself from the people to whom these stories were tailored to; no one in my life was involved in the revolution and, consequently, no one in my life ever heard about this fictionalised version of myself. My identity was a secret which Raghuvir, Meera, and I kept. For what purpose would exposing the inaccuracies of these stories serve? Sachindranath, no doubt, had contrived this plot to create a sort of hero, a martyr, for the new wave of revolutionaries to admire. And, truly, I had disappeared from Amritsar; the trial had not been the public spectacle that Indra might have imagined. A revolutionary is not martyred, in the traditional sense, if his name and life is unknown. Because, I suspect, the IFA had not been able to even attempt their assassination, the authorities had been able to prevent the trial from catching much attention.

Furthermore, when I had first heard of the rumours, I was still experiencing a sort of deep shame for the mistakes of my past. You could say that my acceptance of the rumours was a form of self punishment, for I had internalised the guilt I felt for having once wished to partake in every crime Sachindranath attributed to me. I had been on the verge of cutting through that soldier's throat, I had wanted to give my life to the IFA, and a vindictiveness—that had lived on, deep inside of my soul—had wanted to rejoin my brothers when Bashir told me about Mohan's conspiracy. These were emotions that I had successfully fended off; but I could not guarantee that, had my life repeated itself, I would not have followed my comrades down their path of violence. For many years, I was intimidated—and even afraid—of this darkness in me. What an ironic turn of events we find ourselves in today.

We should have packed our things and left—fled from—Lahore as soon as I read the letter. In fact, we should have escaped months, maybe years, before that letter was even sent. There is nothing, not community nor convenience, worth the safety of those you love. But, for so long, we tried to ignore the warning signs. We fooled ourselves into underestimating the ever growing threat in Lahore. Raghuvir decided that he would make plans to move his family to Amritsar, and I was convinced to join him; but we were too slow in our departure.

On a blistering August day, in 1946, we paid the price for our indolence. It was a brutal and devastating price. It began with the Shah Alami Bazaar being set to flames. There was not much of an attempt to fight off the great host of Muslims that marched through the bazaar, setting fire to every building and shop they passed. There was nothing that could be done against such determined hatred. As soon as we thought that the danger had mellowed, Bhagwan and I raced to the bazaar, hoping there might be some way for us to salvage anything at all. But no fire brigade came to our aid; the city had forsaken its Hindus.

There was nothing we could do but watch as the bazaar—that which had been the cornerstone of our livelihoods—smoulder into ash. And though our spirits were crushed, we watched the flames with a bitter acceptance; for we had already determined that we would leave Lahore behind. The longer we watched the flames, however, the more merchants arrived at the scene. Our detachment was not shared, as they wailed at the site of their shops and goods crumbling into nothingness. Not every Hindu in Lahore had been so set upon departure as us; and not every Hindu had the means to uproot themselves from the city they had called their home for generations. We had been friends with many of these victims; we had always adhered to Raghuvir's policy of placing the community above the business. And there was nothing we could do to console their grief.

“We should leave,” I told Bhagwan. “There is nothing we can do here. We should return to our homes; your family needs you more than these people do.”

But as Bhagwan nodded in agreement, he saw—over my shoulder—another pillar of smoke lifted into the air. “The school!” he exclaimed, pushing past me in the opposite direction of his home. I followed him at a gruelling pace, instantly realising what the source of the smoke had been. When we arrived at its origin, Bhagwan fell to his knees and let out a long and pained cry. You might ask why his mother’s school, and not the bazaar, elicited this untethered response from Bhagwan. Indeed, I admit that a part of me had wondered the same thing. I placed my hand on his shoulder, but offered no words of comfort. For I had not known what to say. The school was to be left behind; there had been no one interested in managing—or even attending—the institution once we were to leave for Amritsar. What had switched in Bhagwan—to fall apart after somberly witnessing the end of the Shah Alami Bazaar—I do not entirely know. Something, I suppose, about the burning of Meera’s school had been too personal for him to set aside.

But the loss of the school was trivial in comparison to what would soon unfold. The destruction of buildings and property is one thing, but the violence that defined the death of the Raj was so much more profound. Eventually, after Bhagwan had mourned, we returned to our homes. I found Raghuvir, Meera, Bhagwan’s siblings, and the servants, on guard in the dining room. They were all armed, and very much on edge, but safe. The fires had not reached our end of the residential district, though we still feared that these attacks were only the beginning.

But for Bhagwan, it had been the end. Less than an hour after I had returned, a loud pounding came from the front door. Raghuvir and the servants rushed to investigate and, from

the dining room, I heard a great commotion. Raghuvir was hysterical; he returned to the room and looked back and forth, from Meera to myself, with wild and shaking eyes.

When he had told us what had happened, he had to force Meera to stay behind. Then, Raghuvir, some of the servants, and I, took up our weapons and sprinted down the street towards Bhagwan's home. The farther we ran, the more smoke filled the very air we were breathing. Great plumes emerged over the rooftops; far greater than those I had seen with Bhagwan at the bazaar or the school. For entire streets and neighbourhoods of Hindu homes had been set ablaze by the Muslim mob. From our end of the district, we had not realised the magnitude of the attacks.

In the distance, gunshots cracked through the air. There was no silence anywhere in the city; where you could not hear battles being waged, you encountered the screams of helpless families who could do nothing to combat the raging fires that engulfed their homes. But we could not help to lend aid—if that was possible—and we did not have the option of joining the forays. We arrived at the remains of Bhagwan's house; and there, too, were the remains of Bhagwan. A shattered man, hard to look at, with skin coated in soot, was sprawled out in the street in front of the scorching inferno. He was sobbing ugly and heart wrenching tears; choking on his disturbing cries. The man was Bhagwan. He had not made it to his house before the rioters. They had torched his home, with his wife and his two sons inside. He had run into the building, desperately searching and calling out for his family; but the heat and the smoke repelled him. He had received no responses; for there was no one left for him to save.

The Muslims did not want to oust us from their city. If that was the case, it would have been easy to board a train or take a road to Amritsar. Their goal was nothing short of eradication. We had all heard the rumours of caravans that would leave from Lahore and travel east, only to be met along the way by gangs of Muslim extremists. Some would make it to Amritsar and other cities, but some would be entirely slaughtered. The trains were hardly better. If one could make it to the station in Amritsar, they would be safe; but it was not guaranteed that you could make it past the Lahore station. And if one was lucky enough to board a train that actually departed before being cleansed of Hindus, the train could be raided along the way.

Bhagwan was not much help as we debated how to escape the city. He only ever talked when necessary, and seemed like an entirely different man. If it was not for his parents and siblings, I do not think he would have made any attempt to save himself from the cullings in Lahore. Raghuvir, Meera, and I tried to weigh the pros and cons of each of our options but, in truth, there seemed to be little difference. We would not make it to Amritsar without a great deal of luck. In the end, we settled on boarding a train and praying for the best. The Raj was coming to end, but it seemed as though we had no more control of our fates than before.

We packed sparingly, and moved in the night. A dejected Bhagwan lagged behind the rest of us as we nervously traversed the streets. When we arrived at the station, others had already boarded the cars, most of which were nearly filled. There was fear in the eyes of every person we saw, for I would have guessed that each of them were Hindus on the same mission as us. There should have been an armed escort to protect the train, but they were nowhere to be seen. Fortunately, Raghuvir and I were products of the old revolution, and each person in our party was equipped with pistols or revolvers. We crammed ourselves into a car and waited; the train did not move from the platform for much longer than usual.

“What will you do when we make it to Amritsar?” Raghuvir asked me.

“I have not yet made up my mind,” I replied. “I suppose it is greatly dependent on what it is like in the city. I may not even seek out Sachindranath at all.”

“You are part of this family now, Jathai; and though I will respect and support any decision you make, you should know that you do not need to return to the life that you forsook to find purpose and belonging. You do not know what you mean to us.”

I wanted to stay with them. I felt, at that point, as though I owed Raghuvir and his family so much, and whatever awaited them in Amritsar would require a lot of hard work. They were restarting in a new city, and I knew that I would feel like I was abandoning them if I decided to part ways. Amritsar was, afterall, my home. If ever there was a time that I could be genuinely helpful to my dear friends, that time had come. But Sachindranath’s invitation remained etched into my mind. After the horror I had just survived, I was once again drawn to taking up the bomb and the revolver. An enemy as obvious as the British Raj—perhaps more so—had reared its head.

As we discussed our coming future, the train had become overloaded. There were now passengers on the roofs of the carts, and more hanging onto the sides. Just when I was sure that we would leave at any moment, I heard a disturbance coming from the car behind our own. Bhagwan and I poked our heads out of a window to see what had happened, and my heart dropped to my stomach. Someone had noticed a group of men on the platform—maybe two dozen—that were stalking in the direction of the train. Only, they were clearly not interested in taking the train to Amritsar. A pistol was drawn, a shot was fired, and suddenly a wave of shrieking made its way through the cars. I cursed as the men began to approach the door nearest me, and I drew and fired my revolver with little hesitation. Raghuvir and the others followed

suit, with some new life having taken possession of Bhagwan's body. He screamed a sort of war cry and paid no attention to his own safety. He stood in the doorway, without cover, viciously unloading his revolver in the direction of the dark figures.

I am sure that they mistook us as soldiers or police, considering the amount of gunshots that erupted from our car. The Muslims had not expected to be met with such furious contention (how could they have?), and we repelled them from the train. I suspect that we saved many lives that night, though they, too, had claimed their own victims. They had been returning fire in our direction, but also in the direction of the defenceless cars. The train had been so overcrowded that you could have shot someone with a blindfold on. In our own car, there was blood on the floor and on the walls. Three of the other passengers whom none of us had known were caught in the crossfire. I felt some guilt, for the attention of the assailing company had been drawn to them by the mere misfortune of being in our proximity. More blood trickled down from the roof and, from the sounds above us, I inferred that one of the poor souls on top of the train had been murdered too. And all of these unfamiliar men and women had been joined by another body, lying on the floor of the car at my feet, being clutched by his wailing parents and siblings: a dead Bhagwan, having sacrificed himself for the only family he had left.

10

"Did your train make it to Amritsar?" Hasan asked, finding the death of Bhagwan to be too uncomfortable.

"It did," Jathai replied.

"Then you found Sachindranath, I suppose."

"In the moment of Bhagwan's death, I made up my mind," Jathai nodded in the affirmative. "I loved Raghuvir and Meera, and I wish I could have helped them rebuild their lives. But—though I was so ignorant to disregard it time after time—I finally realised my own frailty and cowardice. Bhagwan did not need to die. Nor did his wife, nor his sons. And neither did Bashir and Indra, nor the rest of the IFA. Naren did not need to be crippled by those soldiers. But they all met their fates, and it is because men—men like me—have allowed these injustices to transpire.

"As Raghuvir and Meera sobbed, grasping the lifeless body of their eldest son, I was disgusted; but it was not this bloodied flesh that repulsed me. It was myself. I was disgusted by the man who, for so many years, refused to take any sort of action. And still, I am disgusted by myself, even though Sachindranath and I have finally taken the initiative against these brutes and criminals. For I am now acting out of necessity; the choice has been stripped from us. If we do not kill, we are killed; if we do not move against you Muslims, you move against us. But my past self had the power to stand against this future. Mohan understood our reality, he foresaw what would come, and he took up the bomb and the revolver and denounced injustice.

"But Mohan did not wait. Nor did Indra and the rest of them. They all chose to give their lives to their cause back when *choice* was a luxury we still had. They did not accept the conditions of oppression; they did not—like me—wait for someone else to deliver freedom. They did not watch as their friends and family were slaughtered and persecuted, comforting themselves with principles and dreams of an imaginary future."

"And you did?" challenged Hasan. "Tell the families of the Muslims you have killed that you have led an idle and passive life. They will be no more convinced than I."

"But the *choice* is gone, Hasan!" Jathai impatiently responded. "And the choice is gone because of men like me, and men like my father, and the damned satyagrahis too! The whole time we lied, claiming that we restrained ourselves in the face of evil because of some contrived ethics. But while we showed restraint, mothers, fathers, friends, children, were all murdered and abused because none of us would raise a hand against their perpetrators. Was that more ethical than taking up the revolver? Were the lives of English imperialists more valuable than those of Bashir and Bhagwan? Were they more valuable than my mother's?

"The restraint was not based in ethics or values, Hasan, but in weakness. I was too afraid to make the same sacrifice that my comrades did; and so, I allowed them to make it for me. So many men were like me, Hasan, too selfish to confront a criminal in the act. So we placed the burden on others; on the victims and the next witnesses. My mother paid the price of a collective neglect; her death was sealed in fate when Congress, and the rest of India, denounced the bomb and revolver. This is what sent my comrades to the gallows; and it is what burned Bhagwan's family alive."

"But Bhagwan and his family were not killed by the Raj."

"Of course they were. Can you not see that it was the Raj that was the mastermind behind India's greatest lie? It was not an Indian who conquered the Bengalis, who toppled the Mughals, the Marathas, and the Sikhs, who unified the entire subcontinent under a single government. It was England. The Raj gave us the National 'Indian' Congress, and fed our aspirations to join the 'Indian' Civil Service. But it was an obvious and crude sham. No one was fooled into thinking that we shared a history, or a culture, or even a language. But men like me enabled this abhorrent deception. We allowed the Raj to get away with their amalgamation because resistance was unattractive; and in unifying India, our factions were pitted against one another.

"So, of course, Bhagwan was killed by the Raj and, of course, we should have seen it coming. Mohan did not shirk from this truth. He was never an Indian, despite the name of our Association. He was a Pakistani, fighting for the independence of a future Pakistan."

Hasan was disgusted by his prisoner. The longer Jathai spoke, the more bitter and inhuman he sounded. Repulsed by the self-loathing and cynical wreck, Hasan spat back, "You say 'men like you', but I do not know any. You are a warmonger and a spiteful being. I have despised myself—struggled, every night, to sleep—because of the things that this conflict has forced me to do. And now you would say that more bloodshed and violence is needed; and, perhaps, that this violence should have started a long time ago."

"There are many men like me," said Jathai. "If there are not, then why are we fighting? Sachindranath is like me, and so are the men who he introduced me to when I returned to Amritsar. It was embarrassing, for me, to make their acquaintances. For many of them were still young; at a similar age to mine when I fled from my obligations as a revolutionary. When I inquired about his plans, Sachindranath spoke of upcoming, inevitable, conflicts throughout

India. He told me that Partition was inevitable, and that the tensions amongst Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus would only escalate as we fought to win over our homes.

"For about a year, we travelled through the Punjab recruiting and defending Hindu minorities, until our work brought us here. We met with some connections of Sachindranath, who were even more radical than ourselves. Some were veterans of the Indian National Army from the Second World War; nationalists who had fought with the Germans and the Japanese in hopes of using the war to overthrow the Raj. These men were organised—reminiscent of the IFA or, even, of what Sachindranath had told me about the Anushilan Samiti—and they were not afraid to match the violence that I had experienced in Lahore. The men we joined here, in Kashmir, are not spectators; they are not weak and content with allowing those around them to suffer. So yes, Hasan, there are many men like me. They are here, in Kashmir; and many of them are far more passionate than myself."

"Then it is good that I am here," Hasan replied. "And there are many others like me, too."

"And all of you are like me, and my friends; the only difference is which end of the table we sit at."

"Do not compare me to you, you are a—"

"We are the same, Hasan. We are here for the same reason. We are simply atoning for the mistakes of the past. We are paying the price for every moment in which we sacrificed anything less than *everything* for justice and Truth."

"Then freeing the soldier was a mistake? Was it a mistake when you did not join your comrades in their plot against Lord Irwin? Was every moment when you showed empathy—was every moment when you believed that it was wrong to stoop to the level of your enemy—a mistake, Jathai? Do you wish that it had been you who set the buildings ablaze?"

“If that soldier was in front of me today, Hasan, I would take up the blade between us and I would cut his pale throat.”

The two men then fell silent, and looked at the knife on the table. As they had talked, the room’s temperature had fallen to a comfortable coolness. It must have been night, they each thought to themselves. The summer sun was no longer beating down outside. The weather in Kashmir was not as overbearing as it had been in Amritsar and Lahore. It reminded Jathai of London; that unpredictable, yet mild, climate.

Hasan locked eyes with Jathai, but neither said a word. He glimpsed at the knife, then back up to his captive. Jathai did the same. The prisoner’s story was concluded, for there was nothing left that Hasan wished to hear. He picked up the knife and raised it in Jathai’s direction, knowing how he must use it.

DISCUSSION

The Ghost of Amritsar is the product of an interest to explore a fictional medium that I have held for several years. I had not paid enough attention to the progression of the Honors program during my first three semesters and, consequently, I had not realized that I would be required to write a thesis to culminate my studies. My interest in writing a traditional thesis had been largely diminished by the sheer quantity of research projects I had participated in over the past years. The option of a creative thesis, however, appeared to be an opportunity and incentive for me to finally experiment with a form of writing that I expected to eventually engage with anyways.

My initial interest in Indian history almost solely originated from Richard Attenborough's 1982 film, *Gandhi*. The film is far from a perfect depiction of the Indian independence movement though—like all biographical dramas—I have never supposed that it strived for flawless historical accuracy. The importance of *Gandhi* to the development of my understanding of Indian history does not lie in the film's educational value but, rather, in the exposure to Indian history it offered in an uncommonly fascinating manner. Having watched the film for the first time over the summer of 2020, the themes and subjects found in *Gandhi* had remained in the back of my mind until the present.

There is a woefully inadequate inclusion of Indian history in mainstream education and culture. The topics I address in *The Ghost of Amritsar* required research on the second most populous country in the world and on the largest non-violence movement in human history. It follows, then, that the bar for appropriate representation of and interest in Indian history should be quite high. The success of *Gandhi* alone—or the existence of a handful of references to Indian

history in our curriculums or, even, the scarce courses dedicated to topics relating to the subcontinent—do not even approach this bar.

Through my Honors Thesis, I hoped to satisfy both my interest in creative writing and my desire to learn more about the Indian independence movement. Given my preliminary lack of familiarity with either fictional writing or Indian history, I recognized the inherent value in the endeavor of writing *The Ghost of Amritsar*. Though I began my research with high hopes for the final product, I was encouraged in knowing that—regardless of the end result—this project would provide me with an invaluable experience in unfamiliar writing and history.

PURPOSE/INTENT

My initial intentions, in writing *The Ghost of Amritsar*, were to construct some form of an extensive character study. I had planned on my characters to represent some of the prominent leaders of the Indian independence movement—such as Gandhi, Tagore, Jinnah, Tilak, and Bhagat Singh—and for the plot to serve as a device through which these conflicting philosophies could interact with one another. This general direction gradually changed, however, as I conducted my research. I became less interested in reflecting concepts and thoughts that anyone could discover for themselves through independent reading, and directed my attention towards my own observations about the complex relationships among the independence movement, the British Raj, and the Indo-Pakistani conflicts that followed the Partition of 1947.

I derived a new purpose for *The Ghost of Amritsar*: to consider the manipulations of Indian identity and cultural conflicts by the British Raj, and to lead the reader towards asking larger questions about power and political action. By empathetically considering the many conflicting views which were held by the leaders of the Indian independence movement—of all religions, ethnicity, and philosophies—I hoped to construct a means through which I could humanize every actor in what was, truthfully, a long history of inhuman behaviors and offenses. This humanization, in a subject in which only a few voices are ever commonly heard in most curricula, is essential for adequately comprehending the realities and diversities of the Indian independence movement and Partition. Ultimately, through my creative thesis, I hoped to answer the follow question: Following one of history's largest and most successful non-violent movements, what factors led to the brutal and widespread religious intolerance that accompanied the Partition of 1947, and what comparisons can be drawn between the religious conflict of Partition and the national conflict of the Indian independence movement?

On a personal level, I decided to write a creative thesis, as opposed to a traditional thesis, so that I could develop a set of skills which I have not—and would not have—been able to foster otherwise. In addition to the invaluable educational benefits that have come with writing a creative thesis on a subject I originally knew little about, I wanted my Honors Thesis to allow me to learn about my own strengths and weaknesses and the process of writing a historical fiction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The most important literature to my research process included the following works: *Autobiography from the Death Row* by Ram Prasad Bismil, *Jail Diary and Other Writings* by Bhagat Singh, *The Home and the World* by Rabindranath Tagore, *Young India: An Interpretation and a History of the Nationalist Movement from Within* by Lala Lajpat Rai, *Satyarth Prakash* by Dayanand Saraswati, and *India: A Short History* by Andrew Robinson.

Ram Prasad Bismil, Bhagat Singh, and—to a lesser extent—Lala Lajpat Rai provided me with the bulk of my understanding about the operations of the underground revolutionary groups in India during the early 20th century. It was important to acquire a direct look into the lives of the revolutionaries to accurately understand their motivations and values. Furthermore, reading about their activities revealed details about how mundane the majority of an underground revolutionary's conflict with the Raj was. These texts demonstrated the value of writing, the challenges of sustenance and secrecy, and the comparably overwhelming power of the Raj which dictated the lives of the revolutionaries.

The Home and the World was my primary guide to the fictional depiction of the Indian independence movement. Tagore masterfully balanced the specificity of his subject matter with the more broadly applicable themes of modernity, pacifism, tolerance, and morality. Like Tagore, I wanted *The Ghost of Amritsar* to appeal to themes and concepts that extended beyond the Indian independence movement.

Satyarth Prakash by Dayanand Saraswati was, essentially, the founding work of the Arya Samaj. The Arya Samaj was of great importance to *The Ghost of Amritsar*, as the sect of Hinduism was largely a response to the Westernization brought to India by the British Empire. Saraswati and his followers adopted a monotheistic form of Hinduism which relied—like

Christians and the Bible or Muslims and the Quran—on the infallibility of the Vedas. In *The Ghost of Amritsar,* the Arya Samaj serves as a bridge to the conflicts of religion and culture that are found in both the Indian independence movement and the Partition of 1947.

Young India by Lala Lajpat Rai, and *India: A Short History* by Andrew Robinson provided me with the necessary preliminary insight into the history which my thesis would explore. Lala Lajpat Rai was a member of a small group of Indian politicians, who took an early leading role in driving India towards its independence movement, known as the Lal Bal Pal triumvirate. Accordingly, Lajpat Rai wrote *Young India* from a position of invaluable first-hand experience with the revolution.

Andrew Robinson, on the other hand, is a modern British writer who published *India: A Short History* in 2014. Robinson's book looks retrospectively at the history of India—from ancient times up to the Partition of 1947—and analyzes the factors that culminated into the modern religious conflicts between India and Pakistan. This approach to Indian history was particularly relevant to my research, as it actively worked to unravel the misinformation and narratives that have been spun as a result of the region's cultural friction.

METHODOLOGY

In wanting to fairly portray the diverse philosophies of the Indian independence movement, I first needed to establish a thorough familiarity with the history and major actors of the movement. I began my research, then, by reading an assortment of broad sources on Indian history. Within this phase of my research I encountered Andrew Robinson's *India: A Short History*, Jawaharlal Nehru's *The Discovery of India*, and Lala Lajpat Rai's *Young India*. From this point, I drew my attention to names and works that frequently appeared in my preliminary texts, which I further investigated to determine their relevance to my project.

From this process, I grew more familiar with the most influential figures of the Indian independence movement, and was able to identify a reasonable assortment of materials that I could use to develop my comprehension of the leading Muslim, Hindu, violent, and non-violent ideologies during the Indian independence. For this purpose, I relied heavily on primary sources; I looked to the writings of major actors in the independence movement, such as Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Jawaharlal Nehru, Annie Besant, Bhagat Singh, Ram Prasad Bismil, and Rabindranath Tagore. For the purposes of familiarizing myself with the unfiltered sentiments that dominated the Indian political atmosphere of the era, primary sources were my preferred means of avoiding misrepresentation.

Based on this competent conception of the Indian independence movement, I constructed a flexible outline for the plot of *The Ghost of Amritsar*. The ensuing process of actually writing my creative thesis introduced the majority of my usage of secondary sources. In my commitment to portraying a historically plausible narrative, I frequently took long breaks from writing in order to appropriately learn about specific historical events, figures, and timelines. Some of the subjects I required online secondary sources to better understand included the Jallianwala Bagh

massacre, Indians in London, the Chauri Chaura incident, the governor-generals of the British Raj, major cities under the Raj, Partition-related violence, religion, and many other topics.

To accommodate for this continuous research, and the non-linear progression of *The Ghost of Amritsar*, I wrote the ten chapters of my creative thesis out of order. For example, I began by writing the fourth chapter, which I frequently returned to and edited to reflect what I would later write in other chapters. I could not begin with the earlier chapters because my research on both the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and the experience of Indians in London was insufficient, whereas I had already conducted most of my research on the topics that appear in the fourth chapter (such as the Arya Samaj). Similarly, I returned to each chapter, after writing a new one, in order to add details or edits which would maintain a consistency within the chronology, characters, themes, and tone as my research continuously informed me.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The Ghost of Amritsar can be appropriately compared to two sources of literature on the Indian independence movement. The first of which is fictional writing that takes place during, generally, the same time period. I originally planned on using the characters in *The Ghost of Amritsar* to reflect the predominant philosophies and strategies that drove the independence movement; hence, I wanted to become familiar with the likes of Gandhi, Jinnah, and Rabindranath Tagore in order to juxtapose their conflicting thoughts via my characters' dialogues. To achieve this familiarity, I began with Tagore for two purposes: to learn about the polymath's positions on the independence movement, and to use his writings to develop a functional conception of the world in which my own narrative would take place.

I read Tagore's *The Home and the World* because—in reading a short synopsis of the 1916 novel—I found its plot to be concerningly similar to my own. Many of the themes I had hoped to explore in *The Ghost of Amritsar* were, indeed, also found in *The Home and the World*. Tagore's protagonist, Nikhil, is a wealthy and influential Bengali who—not unlike Jathai's internal conflict with traveling to London and the cultural rifts that arise between him and his father—is caught up in the seemingly irreconcilable differences between the West and Bengal.

However, I found there to be more about the plot of *The Home and the World* which contrasted the ideas that had been circulating in my own head than similarities. For instance, Tagore's antagonist, Sandip, hardly places the philosophies he represents in a fair light. Sandip fulfills a role of temptation; one that draws more neutral characters away from the idealism and pacifism of Nikhil towards expediency and passion. In this portrayal, Tagore's biases are undisguised. Sandip, the novel's only significant voice of opposition to Nikhil's non-violent principles, is characterized by deceit and selfishness. Tagore invites the reader into Sandip's

mind when he writes: “Every man has a natural right to possess, and therefore greed is natural. It is not in the wisdom of nature that we should be content to be deprived” (Tagore 45). Through Sandip, I recognized that the intent of *The Ghost of Amritsar* was, in fact, quite different from that of *The Home and the World*. Regardless of the legitimacy of Tagore’s own beliefs, I felt that it would only be fair to portray my own characters with sympathy and in good faith.

To this end, I made an effort to represent the violent revolutionaries as equally and proportionally as the more commonly analyzed—non-violent—voices from the Indian independence movement. The most clear windows into the operations of the revolution are the writings of Bhagat Singh and Ram Prasad Bismil. Both suffering the same fate of execution, Bismil provides his reader with a gritty and unattractive description of the inherent difficulties the revolutionaries faced in confronting the British Empire, while Singh focuses more extensively on ideology and the weight of the revolution.

Though Singh and other writers, to an extent, provided me with details about the operations of the revolutionaries, Bismil was my greatest source of the harsh realities of the underground revolution. It was important, to me, to avoid the over-dramatization that any revolution might implore a writer to exploit. What I found in Bismil’s writing to be most captivating was not his description of elaborate plots and thrilling skirmishes, but the remarkable kinship that the revolutionaries—regardless of religion—exemplified in their unity against the Raj.

While on death row, Ram Prasad Bismil wrote an autobiography detailing his involvement in the revolution. Bismil, an Arya Samaji, dedicates three pages to his relationship with a Muslim revolutionary, Ashfaqullah Khan Warsi. Bismil’s friendship with Ashfaqullah transcended the religious boundaries that would set India against itself in the decades after their

executions. Bismil writes, “Often we had food from the same plate. The thought that there was some difference between a Hindu and a Muslim was gone soon” (Bismil 96). I drew from the brotherhood that Bismil describes as having characterized his Hindustan Republican Association when I constructed the relationships within my fictional Indian Freedom Association. On page 62 of *The Ghost of Amritsar*, I mirror the friendship of Ram Prasad Bismil and Ashfaqullah Khan Warsi in writing, “you may be shocked to learn that I, Jathai, a follower of the Arya Samaj, did sometimes eat off of the same plate as my Muslim brother, Mohan. But I feel no shame in the fraternity that Indra inspired in us.”

Bhagat Singh, on the other hand, is an invaluable source for understanding the mentality and motivations of violent revolutionaries during the Indian independence movement. Singh, an atheist, was more concerned with the principles behind the revolution than the specific actions which made up the resistance itself. In *The Ghost of Amritsar*, I attempt to convey the appeals to socialism, nationalism, and the inspiration of Western revolutions—like the Bolsheviks—which drove Bhagat Singh and other revolutionaries with whom he worked and inspired.

The Ghost of Amritsar brings together the philosophies which were present in the Indian independence movement. To add to the literature that has been written about the time period, I have tried to present and contrast these worldviews fairly, rather than regurgitating the words of their original sources by appealing to one at the expense of the others. At the end of *The Ghost of Amritsar*, Hasan must decide whether he will use the knife to kill Jathai, or to free him; but Hasan’s choice should not be evident or predetermined. Jathai does not represent one side of a coin; he is not a decidedly corrupt and amoral character like Tagore’s Sandip, nor is he a perfect embodiment of the virtuous and hopeful friendship shared between Ram Prasad Bismil and Ashfaqullah Khan Warsi.

SUMMARY

Writing *The Ghost of Amritsar* has wholly altered my perception of the Indian independence movement. Over this past year, I have learned more about Indian history than, I suspect, I would have learned in my entire life had I not set out to complete this project. As is true with all historical subjects, I cannot pretend to have manufactured any decisive and conclusive answers to the questions that I began this process by asking. However, I have certainly affirmed my suspicion of the inadequacies of my previous education on the Indian independence movement.

I have given myself a deeper empathy for the figures whom history has not given the loudest voice. Though remembered for the efforts of Gandhi, Nehru, and Tagore, the dedication of figures like Bhagat Singh and Ram Prasad Bismil are inspiring. Ultimately, the actions and sacrifices of the young, violent, revolutionaries of India's early 20th century were not nearly as influential as they may have hoped them to be. However, the importance of studying these figures is found in understanding the true manipulation and cruelty of the British Raj.

The violence that followed the Partition of 1947 was overtly predictable; not because of the inherently violent nature of those involved, but because of the British Raj's long history of cruel and misleading tactics. The Indian independence movement should not be cynically judged because of the horrors that followed it. Rather, we should find inspiration and value in the camaraderie achieved by diverse religions, ethnicities, cultures, and factions, despite the Raj's best efforts to pit them against one another.

The writing process that I used to complete *The Ghost of Amritsar* was entirely unique to me. Had I begun this creative thesis earlier, I have no doubt that I would have constructed a more mature and developed product. Nonetheless, I chose to write this creative thesis precisely for the

discomfort I expected to face. I have undoubtedly become a strong writer and researcher, and hope that my experiences with this project will lend themselves to a willingness to explore other, equally unfamiliar, mediums.

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