

# TARAKNATH DAS (1884–1958)

## *British Columbia and the Anticolonial Borderlands*

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**T**HOUGH CITED FREQUENTLY in histories of South Asian migrants in the United States of America,<sup>1</sup> the itinerant Indian nationalist and political activist Taraknath Das (1884–1958) has rarely entered the historiography of early twentieth-century British Columbia. Das was a contemporary of South Asian migrants well known within community histories of South Asian Canadian studies, such as Mewa Singh (1881–1915), an early twentieth-century Sikh migrant in British Columbia who shot and killed immigration inspector William Hopkinson in a courtroom in Vancouver.<sup>2</sup> Das was also one of the first politically active South Asian migrants in Canada to link the various struggles of South Asians in British Columbia to the larger struggle of Indian nationalists throughout the world. Das's efforts just before the First World War correspond in time to Mohandas Gandhi's political

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<sup>1</sup> In the twenty-first century, the term "South Asian" is the most common term used for those whose origins lie in the Indian subcontinent. In the United States and Canada during the period under review, the official term frequently used to refer to all South Asians was "Hindu," though that designation included members of all religions, including Sikhs, the majority of such migrants who entered British Columbia at that time. This term emerged from the ongoing discussions of "Hindus" as a race from "Hindustan," which was cemented in the 1911 *Dictionary of Races* used by the US Immigration Service to categorize migrants from what is now called South Asia. In South Asia itself, the term "Hindu" refers to a religious community, though in the early twentieth-century North American context, "Hindu" referred to a racial category, including Sikhs, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, and the entire panoply of religious diversity present in South Asia. One therefore could be a Sikh or a Muslim (in those days, the term "Mahomedan" was used in official discourse) and also be a "Hindu." In official published writing, government officials (both those sympathetic to and those opposed to "Hindu" immigrants), as well as South Asians, consistently used this term to refer to all South Asians in official published writing. Rajani Kanta Das, author of *Hindusthane Workers on the Pacific Coast* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1923), remarks on this distinction in his work and chooses to use the term "Hindusthane" to refer to all South Asians resident at that time. As Rajani Kanta Das wrote from within the United States, lived in New York, and taught at New York University during the early 1920s, he was well aware of the ways official discourse in North America contrasted those used in the India of his time.

<sup>2</sup> For details on Mewa Singh and the murder of Hopkinson, see Hugh Johnston, "Singh, Mewa," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 14, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/singh\\_mewa\\_14E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/singh_mewa_14E.html).

rise in South Africa. In the words of an eminent scholar of Indian migration, Das was “the first important political activist to give a convergent orientation to the aspirations of the Indian communities in the north of the American continent.”<sup>3</sup> In the words of a contemporary German editor of his work, he was a “Bengali social-revolutionary, freedom-fighter, and social scientist.”<sup>4</sup> This article explores how Victoria (WSÁNEĆ and Lekwungen territory) and Vancouver (Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh, and Squamish territory) comprised a key portion of his itinerary since, from 1907 to 1914, it functioned as a base for his South Asian anticolonial operations. During these years he also frequently travelled to Washington, California, and Oregon, other important locations for the burgeoning Pacific Northwest networks of South Asian anticolonial resistance.

This article explores Das’s itinerary and anticolonial work in British Columbia alongside other key individuals active in the region, such as Guru Ditta Kumar and Husain Rahim. Such a perspective enables us to reflect on the nationalism of “expatriate patriots” as seen within the context of settler colonialism and the frontiers of expanding settler states such as the United States and Canada.<sup>5</sup> A focus on Das’s work and life across the American-Canadian borderlands integrates South Asian migrants into British Columbia’s history as a part of the Trans-Pacific, a context of political organization and anticolonial activism in the early twentieth century. If borderland spaces are regions “at the intersections of frontiers, borders, and boundaries” (in this case, British Columbia and Washington),<sup>6</sup> Das enlivened this space primarily to construct an anticolonial network of activists and allies in the struggle for Indian independence, making it an anticolonial borderlands space. His movements also contributed to the formation of an inter-imperial

<sup>3</sup> Brij Lal, “East Indians in British Columbia, 1904–14: A Historical Study in Growth and Integration” (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1976), 58.

<sup>4</sup> Christian Bartolf, “Introduction,” *Letter to a Hindoo: Taraknath Das, Leo Tolstói and Mahatma Gandhi* (Berlin: Gandhi Information Zentrum, 1997), 9.

<sup>5</sup> “Expatriate patriots” refers to those Indian anticolonial nationalists travelling in North America, Southern Africa, Eastern Asia, and parts of Great Britain and Europe in the early twentieth century just before the First World War. Taraknath Das is a contemporary of other such “expatriate patriots” such as Shyamji Krishnavarma and Madame Bhikaji Cama (active in Paris), Mohandas Gandhi (active in South Africa), and V.D. Savarkar (active in London and Paris). Das is the only one whose politics were shaped in its early phase in the environment of the Pacific Northwest, the frontier of a settler colonial region including the American and Canadian settler states. See Harald Fischer Tiné, “Indian Nationalism and the ‘World Forces’: Transnational and Diasporic Dimensions of the Indian Freedom Movement on the Eve of the First World War,” *Journal of Global History* 2, no. 3 (2007): 325–44.

<sup>6</sup> John W.I. Lee and Michael North, eds., *Globalizing Borderlands Studies in Europe and North America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 2.

system of surveillance of migrants from South Asia. A borderlands framework – which centres the usage of resources and communications networks that traversed the United States and Canada – is central for the appreciation of Das's significance. Borderlands scholarship within North American history has many points of departure, with United States–Canada borderlands studies found primarily in studies of how migrants entered or exited nationally defined spaces.<sup>7</sup> Das's life lends a particularly anticolonial slant to inhabiting a borderlands space because, as an ardent anticolonialist, he used strategic locations in the United States and Canada to his advantage. For a variety of reasons, whether fleeing racist violence, organizing on behalf of migrant workers, organizing anticolonial networks within the Ghadar movement, or finding safe havens to produce anticolonial publications, South Asian migrants in the first two decades of the twentieth century repeatedly crossed borders between British Columbia and parts of Washington. Tracing Das's specific itinerary, which encompassed parts of British Columbia, Washington, and Oregon, enables a clear understanding of how this space appeared to early twentieth-century South Asian migrants.

South Asians have entered historical studies of North American history primarily through consideration of community histories, interracial intimacies, entanglements with immigration restrictions, overseas surveillance, and the growth of political intelligence.<sup>8</sup> In the context of

<sup>7</sup> The vast borderlands historiography in North American history began by building on the work of Frederick Jackson Turner, Herbert Bolton, Richard White, Patricia Limerick, and William Cronon. Significant reflections on frontiers and borderlands scholarship feature Howard Lamar and Leonard Thompson, eds., *The Frontier in History: North America and Southern Africa Compared* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981); Pekka Hämäläinen and Samuel Truett, "On Borderlands," *Journal of American History* 98, no. 2 (2011): 338–61; and the *American Historical Review* Forum Essay, "Borders and Borderlands," 104, no. 3 (1999): 813, with Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron's "From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in Between in North American History," 814–41. Adelman and Aron's forum essay was followed by responses in the next issue, by Evan Haefeli, Christopher Ebert Schmidt-Nowara, as well as a jointly written response by John R. Wunder and Pekka Hämäläinen, *American Historical Review* Forum Essay Responses, "Borders and Borderlands," 104, no. 4 (1999): 1221–35. Histories of Canada focused on borderlands and frontiers include the work of W.J. Eccles, *The Canadian Frontier* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983); and J.M.S. Careless, *Frontier and Metropolis: Regions, Cities, and Identities in Canada before 1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988). For a recent analysis from social science history, see Randy William Widdis, "Crossing an Intellectual and Geographic Border: The Importance of Migration in Shaping the Canadian-American Borderlands at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," *Social Science History* 34, no. 4 (2010): 445–97.

<sup>8</sup> See Hugh Johnston, *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru: The Sikh Challenge to Canada's Colour Bar* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014); Norman Buchigani, Doreen Marie Indra, and Ram Srivastava, *Continuous Journey: A Social History of South Asians in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985); Vivek Bald, *Bengali Harlem and the Lost Histories of South Asian*

migration in the colonial period, the numbers of South Asians entering British Columbia in the early twentieth century pales in comparison to what it was in other regions. Millions migrated to Malaya, the Straits Settlements, Sri Lanka, and Burma between 1834 and 1930, whereas approximately eighty thousand migrated to Canada, Australia, Hawai'i, Mexico, Panama, and Argentina. Numbers of migrants in British Columbia began to grow from 1904 in very small increments, and over two thousand appeared in the watershed year of 1907; but, until the 1920s, the total number hovered at around five thousand. The political significance of the relatively small numbers of migrants in the Pacific Northwest (though broadcast in the popular press as being about ten thousand) outweighs that of the limited numbers in other parts of the world. This significance is drawn from the fact that key locations on the Pacific Coast – Vancouver, Victoria, Seattle, Portland, Astoria, San Francisco – were hotbeds of radical labour politics as well as the birthplace of the Ghadar Party, a trans-regional anticolonial political organization that not only published newspapers and political pamphlets but also procured arms to build a revolution against the British Empire. The most politically visible portion of these migrants was found in the borderland regions in the Pacific Northwest. There were various types of migrants in the Pacific Northwest at the turn of the twentieth century. Labourers worked in Vancouver and throughout British Columbia in Mill Side, Fraser River Mill, New Westminster, Port Moody, Abbotsford, and Port Haney as well as in Portland and Astoria, Oregon. Significant numbers of migrant university students could be found in Seattle (at the University of Washington) as well as in Pullman, Bellingham, and Corvallis.<sup>9</sup>

#### TARAKNATH DAS AND THE BC BORDERLANDS

Tarakanth Das entered the Pacific Northwest, replete with Asian migrants of various origins, in 1906. The son of Kali Mohan Das, an employee of the Check Office in Calcutta, Tarakanth Das was born in 1884 in Majhipara, north of Calcutta. His upbringing as a student in secondary school and college included study circles with revolutionary

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*America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality, and the Law in the North American West* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011); and Seema Sohi, *Echoes of Mutiny: Race, Surveillance, and Indian Anticolonialism in North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> See *Span of Life* 5, no. 3 (March 1912), a magazine featuring articles by prominent South Asian migrants such as Guru Ditt Kumar, whose "Hindus in the United States: Activities of the Hindu Students and Laborers on the Pacific Coast," 6–11, offers a panoramic summary of the different groups of South Asians in the Pacific Northwest at the time.

groups, such as the well-known revolutionary society Anushilan, formed in 1903. From then on he attended numerous meetings of young revolutionaries, including Jatin Mukherjee, a leader of Yugantar, a revolutionary group that planned assassinations and offered a culture of physical training in order to overthrow the British in India. At one meeting called by Mukherjee, Taraknath Das, along with others, was instructed to travel to Japan and other parts of the world, including the United States, to attain education, military training, and resources for promoting the cause of Indian independence. In 1905, he left for Japan, took courses at the University of Tokyo, and worked with pan-Asianists and other Indian nationalists. Under pressure from the British government to curtail seditious activity, the Japanese authorities encouraged Taraknath Das to leave Japan. In the summer of 1906, he boarded the *Tango Maru*, which arrived in Seattle on 12 July of that year.<sup>10</sup> In Washington, he worked on the railways and in odd jobs before moving to San Francisco. Operating from this northern Californian base, he found in Washington and Oregon a burgeoning community of Indian labourers working in lumber and shingle mills, in small-scale agriculture, on celery farms, and in various forms of seasonal labour.

At the time of Das's arrival on the Pacific Coast, India was seeing the rise of several political organizations that focused on self-help, moral regeneration, social service, physical culture, and nationalist anticolonial politics. In both the Bengal and Bombay presidencies, key regions of the colonial state, organizations such as Anushilan and popular nationalist figures such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak (the Marathi nationalist who was sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment for seditious writings in the Marathi paper *Kesari*) had spurred into action a new world of extremists who had taken to political violence and planning for revolution. Indian revolutionary centres emerged in Paris, London, and New York, and, with Das, parts of the Pacific Coast of North America. In 1907, India itself was alight with nationalist agitation of various sorts in the wake of the 1905 partition of Bengal, including numerous individuals and organizations in Bengal, Madras, Bombay, Punjab, and other parts of central and northern India. In addition to the core groups, such as the Anushilan Samiti, James Campbell Ker, personal assistant to the director of criminal intelligence,

<sup>10</sup> See Tapan Mukherjee, *Taraknath Das: Life and Letters of a Revolutionary in Exile* (Calcutta: National Council of Education, 1998); the biographical sketch by Ranendranath Das and Tapan Mukherjee, in *Letter to a Hindu: Taraknath Das, Leo Tolstoy, and Mahatma Gandhi*, ed. Christian Bartolf, 66–78 (Berlin: Gandhi Information Zentrum, 1997). See also Das's petition for naturalization in the United States, dated 8 February 1908, and filed in Seattle, Washington, for further details.

noted eight examples of “sedition” published in India, including *Bande Mataram* and *Yugantar*, as well as five examples published outside of India.<sup>11</sup> Prominent nationalists seen as dangerous to colonial India were listed in England, France, the United States, Germany, and Turkey. Das’s entry into the Pacific Northwest coincides with the opening of the Indian colonial state’s documentation of the multifaceted global tendrils of anticolonial organizations, newspapers, and individuals.

In early 1907, Das got a job as a laboratory helper at Berkeley and was admitted as a special student in chemistry. At the end of the spring 1907 semester, he passed the civil service examination for the position of interpreter in the US Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization Service and was posted in Vancouver in May of that year. From this point onward, as an American employee living in Vancouver, he began shuttling between Vancouver, Victoria, San Francisco, Seattle, and different areas in Oregon. However, British Columbia is where his actual work as an Indian revolutionary began, as he witnessed and then responded to two particular riots in September 1907, including the Vancouver riots against Asians.<sup>12</sup> Interviewed by Vancouver’s *Daily Province*, Das enters the Canadian record by mentioning that Indians were fleeing high taxes and oppressive conditions in India.

Due to the rising numbers of Indian immigrants in 1906, the BC legislature, on 27 March 1907, unanimously voted to disenfranchise all South Asians. In April 1907, South Asians were denied the vote in Vancouver municipal elections. South Asians were thereby excluded from serving on juries, being employed by the public service, or getting jobs on public works contracts. Less than a year from when he entered the province, a Canadian order-in-council mentioning the continuous journey legislation was issued. The continuous journey legislation was an amendment to the Immigration Act, passed on 10 April 1908, stating that the Government of Canada could prohibit the landing of any immigrant who did not come to Canada by continuous journey from her or his country of origin.<sup>13</sup> This amendment resulted in the successful reduction

<sup>11</sup> James Campbell Ker, *Political Trouble in India, 1907–17* (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1917), chaps. 1 and 2. Ker, the personal assistant to the director of criminal intelligence, C.P. Stevenson-Moore, compiled confidential reports between 1907 and 1917 that are contained in the India Office Records (hereafter IOR), IOR/L/P&J/12/1, with the American and Canadian material culled from circular no. 5 of 1908, “Note on the Anti-British Movement among Natives of India in America, and circular no. 12 of 1912, “Indian Agitation in America.”

<sup>12</sup> See John Price, “‘Orienting’ the Empire: Mackenzie King and the Aftermath of the 1907 Race Riots,” *BC Studies* 156 (Winter 2007–08): 53–81, for an analysis of how these riots resulted in further restrictions and efforts to prohibit Asian immigration to Canada.

<sup>13</sup> For the specific language of the amendment, see <https://pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/continuous-journey-regulation-1908>.

of large numbers of Indian immigrants into Canada: only twenty-nine immigrants (all of them return residents) from India entered Canada from 1909 to 1913, compared to several thousand in 1907 and 1908.<sup>14</sup> Though the numbers were greatly reduced because of this legislation, the earlier arrivals had created small communities in Victoria and Vancouver, and these became the base for political agitation in both local and global terms. In both of these cities, South Asian communities began to form in this period, comprised primarily of Punjabi Sikhs, who began a Khalsa Diwan Society in Victoria in 1912. Most early migrants found work in forestry and lumber mills in Victoria and Vancouver. With regard to the history of consciousness and activism related to Canadian immigration law and the exclusion of South Asians, British Columbia is the point of origin for both legislative actions and organized Indian protest. It was home to one part of the growing trans-regional Indian nationalism of the era.

After the Bellingham riots of September 1907, in which a mob of white men attacked South Asians in their homes, the small but growing communities of South Asians on the Pacific Coast began to organize and take refuge in Vancouver.<sup>15</sup> In this context, Das started the *Free Hindusthan*,<sup>16</sup> a newspaper modelled after Indian nationalist publications circulating in India, England, and France. It was also the first South Asian publication of any kind in Canada. Some of its models included the *Bande Mataram* (published in Calcutta), another *Bande Mataram* (published in Geneva), and the *Indian Sociologist* (published in Paris).<sup>17</sup> Das was listed as the “manager” of the paper, and the first edition in April included long pieces about famine in India (which the paper attributed to British policy), articles about Indian religion, the German revolution of 1848, and lengthy analyses of the challenges facing the movements of Indian labourers across imperial spaces. Published in the press room of the Socialist Party of Canada, which published the *Western Clarion*,

<sup>14</sup> See Lal, “East Indians in British Columbia,” 15, for a list of migrants admitted into Canada from 1904 to 1914. The significant years are 1906–07 at 2,120 and 1907–08 at 2,620 migrants admitted.

<sup>15</sup> Circular no. 12, “Indian Agitation in America,” 17 December 1912, IOR/L/P&J/12/1, 3.

<sup>16</sup> The spelling of “Hindusthan,” in English, is a transliterated English rendering of the term from Hindi and Urdu. This transliteration is not a standardized version, as the spelling in *Free Hindusthan* differs from the common contemporary transliteration of Hindustan. In this article, the term “Hindusthan” is set in quotation marks whenever Das’s periodical used that spelling.

<sup>17</sup> C.J. Stevenson-Moore, director of criminal intelligence, stated that the *Free Hindusthan* was “an exact copy in size and get up of Shyamji Krishnavarma’s *Indian Sociologist*, the chief anti-British revolutionary organ,” circular no. 5 of 1908, “Note on the Anti-British Activity among Natives of India in America,” 5.

the first issue appeared in April 1908. This resulted in Das and the *Free Hindusthan* appearing on the radar of the British Empire's Criminal Intelligence Division as files on him and copies of the paper appeared in Ottawa and the India Office in London. As C.J. Stevenson-Moore noted in the first report about the issue: "its object is to create the impression among Canadians that there will be serious danger to the Empire if Hindus are shut out of Canada as they are shut out of Australia."<sup>18</sup> Two thousand copies were printed and sent to India, the United States, and South Africa. Given the seditious nature of the paper, it was immediately banned by the British administration in India, which led to scrutiny of Das's position at the US Immigration and Naturalization Services and his resignation on 18 April 1908.

Das moved the publication to Seattle in the middle of 1908 and then to New York for 1909 and 1910. He had connections to Indian anticolonial colleagues in New York who were allied with Irish nationalists in that city. One such ally was George Freeman, who assisted Das in shifting his operation to New York, and Freeman's paper, *Gaelic American*, offered funds and resources so that Das could resume publication in 1909.<sup>19</sup>

The *Free Hindusthan* demonstrated a wide-ranging consciousness of the treatment of Indian migrants in South Africa, Fiji, Australia, and British Columbia. In an analysis of how five hundred "Hindusthanees," mostly Sikh veterans, sold their homes for passage money but were denied entry and thus rendered shelterless and forced into starvation, the paper mentions that the "treatment we get in British Columbia is heart-rending."<sup>20</sup> With the subheading "An Organ of Freedom, and of Political, Social, and Religious Reform," on the cover page of each edition the paper included a clear line item about resistance to tyranny. In the first April 1908 issue, this line was: "Resistance to tyranny is obedience to God." In the second issue, in July 1908, it was: "Resistance to tyranny is service to humanity and a necessity of civilization." The *Free Hindusthan* included updates on political prisoners and political activity in India, such as the hanging of Kanai Lal Dutt (the executioner of an informer named Gossain on 10 November 1908) and the whereabouts of various

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> See the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA), <https://www.saada.org/browse/source/the-free-hindusthan>, for images of the first issue in April 1908, published in Vancouver, as well as the third issue, published in November–December 1908 in Seattle. All remaining issues appear in original form in IOR/L/P&J/6/1137, file 38710, including editions published in Seattle in July 1908 and the New York editions from November–December 1908, July–August 1908, and March–April 1910. The file also includes a signed copy of the first number sent to Hopkinson's informant, Swami Trigunatita, in San Francisco.

<sup>20</sup> *Free Hindusthan*, April 1908, 1.



revolutionaries (such as Harilal Gandhi in South Africa, Birendranath Dutt Gupta in Calcutta, or Vinayak Savarkar).

One of the most pressing issues covered by the paper was the topic of famine, mentioned in detail in each issue. In the November–December 1908 issue, pictures of victims of British rule, stark images of Indians emaciated from starvation, were published above the bold statement that the *Free Hindusthan* “advocates liberation of Hindusthan, that millions may be saved from the starvation caused by legalised pillage of India by the British government.”<sup>21</sup> In an anonymous piece, likely authored by Taraknath Das, famine is presented as the result of British policy. It cites the authority of the economist Robert Ellis Thompson, who declared that, until “Hindusthan” asserted its independence, it would be ravaged by British-made famines.<sup>22</sup>

Like other newspapers of the time, especially the *Indian Sociologist*, references to Western political theorists and historical figures appeared in most issues of the *Free Hindusthan* and justified the call for revolution in India. Each edition was adorned with quotations by Herbert Spencer on freedom as well as with references to John Stuart Mill and Giuseppe Mazzini. Each edition offered a “Thought for the Month,” and the July 1908 edition’s thought was Mill’s: “rebellions are never really unconquerable until they have become rebellions for an idea.” The final edition, issued in April 1910, carried a story titled “Our Right to Create a Revolution in India.” Citing inspiration from Abraham Lincoln and Giuseppe Mazzini, the author comments: “We assert that we have power enough to create a revolution, because the history of India has seen many a revolution and she can have another one in this time of dire need. If creating a revolution is within our power, how to touch the vital point of the source of national energy, so that a motion of uncontrollable force may sweep the name and vestige of national slavery from the face of India, is the vital question.”

What activated the attention of the Criminal Intelligence Office was the continual mention of Indians in North America. Initially produced and sent from Vancouver, the *Free Hindusthan* functioned as a source of information for Indian revolutionaries regarding Indians in Canada. In the second edition, in a brief essay titled “Our Position in Canada,” Das mentions how Indians are kept out of the dominions of the British Empire: “The gates of Australia are shut against us and South Africa is already a forbidden land. Our attempt to breathe air in South Africa is

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., November–December 1908, 1.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 2.

so disagreeable that several educated people and merchants are put in prison." The goal of setting the situation of Indians in Canada within a broader context continues in the same edition in "Hindusthanees in England," which offers details about political meetings and the locations of political organizations. In the third edition, in November–December 1908, Das looks at how, in Victoria, Sikhs convened a mass protest meeting and sent a cable to Morley, Minto, and Laurier. According to the paper, Sikhs in Victoria, fearing the treatment rendered to our countrypeople in the Transvaal and Mauritius, strongly protested the orders of deportation that would send Sikhs from Canada to British Honduras.<sup>23</sup> It mentions how the Canadian government feared that retired Sikh soldiers would be inspired by the idea of political freedom, and it further states: "we know that in the sugar plantations of Fiji and other islands, our people are kept in a worse condition than those of slaves of past days." According to the author, "the reason for sending Sikhs from Canada to British Honduras is to put them in a system of contract labor so that they will lose their idea of free-will and independent labor."

It was becoming clear to authorities that the *Free Hindusthan* was appealing to Sikhs in Canada due to its link to ongoing nationalist developments in India. The September 1908 edition published a letter from a Sikh student in the United States: "The Feringhi (foreigners) are going to interfere in all our business if we remain calm and quiet. The time is not very far when they will come to settle our social and family questions, such as marriage and protection of women. The man who supports British rule to make Khalsas slaves of foreign rulers is a traitor to all Khalsas and to our sacred religion. Every true Khalsa must do his best to free the nation from such slavery."<sup>24</sup> In October 1908, it argues that Indian soldiers (like Nepali Gurkhas and Sikhs) were essential to maintaining British rule in 1857–58 but that this may change if "we preach the sense of Hindu honor among the Nepalese, to stimulate their national desire to get a place among international powers." Finally, in the November–December 1909 edition, the paper mentions a meeting on 3 October 1909 at the Sikh Temple in Vancouver. At this meeting, Natha Singh made a speech, published in the *Free Hindusthan*, mentioning

<sup>23</sup> In the fall of 1908, the British Empire had initiated a program to transport and resettle British Indian labourers from British Columbia to British Honduras, for work on sugar plantations and railways. This proposal developed in the context of heightening anti-Indian agitation in Canada as well as the notion that Indians would fare better in the environment of Honduras rather than that of Canada. Due to widespread opposition, the scheme failed to materialize, but it served as a marker of the perception of Indian migration to British Columbia at the turn of the century.

<sup>24</sup> Cited in circular no. 12, "Indian Agitation in America," 17 December 1912, IOR/L/P&J/12/1, 4.

that medals won by Sikh warriors in the British Empire were symbols of slavery. For Natha Singh, “the medals they wore signify that they fought for the British as mercenaries against the cause of our fellow countrymen, or some free people. The medals acquired by serving in the British army ought to be regarded as medals of slavery.”<sup>25</sup> The paper, to the eyes of the British authorities, encouraged Sikhs in Canada to link their struggles to those in India.

It is this latter point, along with the mention of sympathetic figures in the United States like William Jennings Bryan,<sup>26</sup> that caught the attention of immigration inspector William Hopkinson and E.J. Swayne, both of whom commented on the severity of critiques emanating from the *Free Hindusthan*. Swayne mentioned that the “general tenour is theosophical but from time to time contains articles setting forth the so-called unfair treatment of Hindus in Vancouver, and has reference to agitation in Bengal, and in tone is anti-British.”<sup>27</sup>

#### DAS AT THE CENTRE OF ANTICOLONIAL NETWORKS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

During his service for the US Immigration Service in Vancouver, Das learned how Indian migrants were excluded from admission to Canada, frequently on the grounds of Liability for Public Charge (LPC), which resulted in three hundred Indians being denied entry to Canada in 1908.<sup>28</sup> Physical and mental defects, diseases, and moral turpitude were all cited by immigration officials. The assessment of these defects relied entirely on the whims of the immigration officers. Das also helped Indian immigrants acquire legal representation as he found that, during his time there in early 1908, “Hindus were medically examined at the rate of four a minute and rejected.”<sup>29</sup> Through his experiences in this borderland context, he worked to help Indian migrants who appeared at the border by connecting them

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Bryan was an American senator from Nebraska in the 1890s and US secretary of state from 1913 to 1915. Sympathetic to the cause of Indian independence, after a tour of India in 1906, he wrote a condemnation of British colonialism in India titled *British Rule in India*. This was reproduced in two newspapers – *India*, 20 July 1906, and the *Bengalee*, 4 August 1906 – and was later published and circulated by the Yugantar Ashram of San Francisco.

<sup>27</sup> IOR/L/P&J/6/1137, file 320/1909, “Confidential Memorandum on Matters Affecting the East Indian Community in British Columbia,” by Colonel E.J. Swayne.

<sup>28</sup> For a full list of migrants detained and debarred on various charges, including the LPC (others including trachoma), see Rajani Kanta Das, *Hindusthanees Workers on the Pacific Coast* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1923).

<sup>29</sup> Taraknath Das, testimony, Circuit Court, Coquille, Cooks County, OR, 20 May 1912, cited in Mukherjee, *Taraknath Das*, 12.

to lawyers who worked his networks. By the end of his time there, Das clandestinely coached migrants – in languages like Hindi, Punjabi, and Bengali – to avoid any mention of marriage, religion, or family as polygamy was cited as a reason to deny entry, even though it was not practised by Sikhs and only by a select number of Muslims and Hindus.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, it is not clear whether any of the Hindus or Muslims who appeared in Canada during these years practised polygamy. Polygamy was also used in colonial South Africa for the same goal.

In the early years of Indian entry into Canada, before the First World War, Das worked with nearly all of the Indian anticolonial activists in the region. In Victoria, he worked with Guru Ditta Kumar, an old friend from Calcutta whom he knew from Anushilan, the radical nationalist organization that facilitated Das's trip to Japan. Together they set up a grocery store and worked with Indian labourers in the region. A native of Jammu, and an apprentice to a photographer in Rawalpindi in the 1890s, Kumar taught Hindi and Urdu in National College in Calcutta before arriving in Victoria on 31 October 1907.<sup>31</sup>

From 1907 to 1909, Kumar lived in Victoria but constantly visited Seattle. In November 1909, he travelled to Vancouver and started the Swadesh Sevak Home, on 1632 West 2nd Avenue in Fairview. This home provided social services and educational services to Indian labourers and also served as the site of a Gurmukhi (the script in which Punjabi was written) monthly paper, the *Swadesh Sevak*, which attracted the attention of the authorities. According to intelligence reports, the tone of the paper was "objectionable and bordering on seditious," and it was "full of exhortations to the Sikhs to unite and rise up from their slumber."<sup>32</sup> Though Kumar wrote in a figurative style, the intelligence department mentioned that the context "hint[ed] at a more physical and material rising against the foreigner."<sup>33</sup> Copies of the paper were sent to India in batches of five hundred. Due to allegedly seditious content, primarily exhorting Sikhs to oppose British military service, it was prohibited in 1911 under the Sea Customs Act. In July 1911, G.D. Kumar wrote to the government of India from Vancouver protesting this prohibition, but he stopped once it was no longer possible to send the paper to India. After this, Kumar appeared in the record in Seattle, where he was likely behind

<sup>30</sup> Mukherjee, *Tarakanath Das*, 12–13.

<sup>31</sup> IOR/L/P&J/12/1, "Confidential note on the anti-British movement among natives of India in America."

<sup>32</sup> IOR/L/P&J/12/1, file 126/13, "Indian agitation in USA and Canada," 5.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

the publication of *Span of Life*, a magazine published in 1912 about the travails of South Asian migrants in that area.<sup>34</sup>

As a leading figure in the small but growing world of Indian migrants in British Columbia, Das was at the forefront of receiving the Gaekwar of Baroda, the head of the princely state of Baroda, on his trip to Canada.<sup>35</sup> The maharaja was travelling to Vancouver and stopped in Victoria for a day on 22 June 1910.<sup>36</sup> He read out the address, which focused on educational reforms and the need to lift up the Indian people, as recommended by then popular nationalists like Gokhale and Dutt.

Dr. Sunder Singh, based in Victoria, was another prominent activist connected to Das. Singh represents yet another strand of activism in British Columbia, one not focused on Indian independence in India but, rather, on the lives, safety, and dignity of Indian migrants in this province. In Canada since 1909, Dr. Sunder Singh produced the *Aryan*, a newspaper dedicated to the struggles of Indian migrants in British Columbia. Most likely, the name *Aryan* was chosen to cement the “civilized” dignity of South Asian migrants in an era of racialized anxiety and growing negativity towards Indian migrants. In existence for only one year, in August 1911 the *Aryan* was advertised as “the only Hindu paper in Canada” and as a paper “devoted to the spread of the Eastern view of Truth, the Interests of the Hindus in the British Dominions, and the causes of the present unrest in India.”<sup>37</sup> Copies of the *Aryan* were sent to Sikhs in India as well as to students at Khalsa College in Amritsar.

Published in Victoria, the September 1911 edition of the *Aryan* cited a variety of sources, such as Queen Victoria, the Bible, and Robert Burns. In an essay titled “Canada’s Warm Welcome and Christian Greetings to Fellow-Subjects from Hindusthan,” Singh responds to an unfavourable

<sup>34</sup> IOR/L/P&J/6/1137, file 320/1909, “Confidential Memorandum on Matters Affecting the East Indian Community in British Columbia, by Colonel E.J. E Swayne.”

<sup>35</sup> India in 1910 featured several different political orders, including directly occupied territories in the domains of the British Empire (in Bengal, Madras, and Bombay Presidencies, originating in the urban settlements of the East India Company of Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay that transformed into company towns from the 1600s). It is from these regions that many of the well-known nationalists emerged, including Taraknath Das from Bengal’s colonial Calcutta and Tilak from Bombay. However, much of India at that time featured “princely states,” or independent kingdoms, that held “subsidiary alliance” relationships in which internal autonomy was retained but defence and foreign affairs were managed by the British Empire. Baroda, now a city in the Indian province of Gujarat, was one of over five hundred princely states in colonial India. The Maharaja of Baroda, like many other princes, travelled extensively around the world and promoted internal social reforms as well as patronizing educational and philanthropic activities. See Barbara Ramusack, *Indian Princes and Their States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), for a historical overview of the princely states in colonial India.

<sup>36</sup> IOR/L/P&J/6/1137, file 2173.

<sup>37</sup> IOR/L/P&J/6/1137, file 16940.

assessment of Hindus by saying: “Our fraternal advice would be to start a peroxide factory for India’s teeming millions before it is too late. We are sure there would be a great demand for it. The Hindus in Canada especially will appreciate his efforts in this direction.” The title and tenor of the *Aryan* clearly aimed to argue that Indians, despite the disagreement of Europeans, should be included within “Aryan” civilization. In a manner that would later reverberate in Mohandas Gandhi’s pushes for recognition of Indian rights in colonial South Africa, Singh cited Sir Krishna G. Gupta, member of the Indian Civil Service and educated in University College, London, on how there is a tendency in the self-governed dominions to class Indians with the “savage races [that] dwelt in the Colonies, forgetting that Indian civilization stretches back before the European.”

Dr. Sunder Singh wrote on behalf of Indian immigrants abused by Europeans, but he fit right into the racial and civilizational logics of the time as he argued for Indians to be classed as equivalent to Europeans. Das also exemplified this position in his defence of South Asian migrants in Oregon, as recorded by the *Morning Oregonian* in 1910. When interviewed about attacks on South Asians in St. John’s, he said: “We Hindus are from the same stock of Caucasian people as you are. We might have different tastes and customs, but no one with the slightest knowledge of ethnology and history of civilization will deny the merit of our civilization.”<sup>38</sup> Such a worldview was also present in Taraknath Das’s citizenship applications to the United States (he applied in 1906, 1912, and 1914). In his first application, he is rejected on the grounds that natives of India could not be considered white persons and were therefore ineligible for naturalized citizenship under US Naturalization Law. His response, in a letter to the US Attorney General Charles J. Bonaparte, includes, among other things, an argument that Hindus belonged to the Caucasian race and, therefore, were part of the white race.<sup>39</sup>

Another figure associated with Das in British Columbia was the socialist Husain Rahim. “Husain Rahim” was an alias as Rahim’s birth name was Chairag Khairaj Varma. He was known as Chaganlal, from Porbander, the home of Mohandas Gandhi. According to his history sheet, Rahim arrived on 14 January 1910 as a first-class passenger, and he mentioned his intention of touring Montreal. On 23 April 1910, he visited the Swadesh Sevak Home, which had been started by

<sup>38</sup> *Morning Oregonian*, 1 April 1910. See Renisa Mawani, “Specters of Indigeneity in British-Indian Migration, 1914,” *Law and Society Review* 46, no. 2 (2012): 369–403.

<sup>39</sup> For a discussion of this correspondence, see Mukherjee, *Taraknath Das*, 9–10.

G.D. Kumar and was connected to Taraknath Das, expressing sympathy with Krishnavarma. Soon after his arrival in Canada, he assumed management of the Canada India Supply and Trust Company Limited, an incorporated trading company in Vancouver. When it became known that he was to stay in Canada, the local immigration agent ruled that he was not in the country legally and was therefore liable for deportation. In June 1910, he applied for leave to remain in the country and said that, if denied, he would take the case to court. On 19 October 1910, orders for his arrest were issued and, indeed, he was arrested on 27 October 1910. Letters from Taraknath Das, copies of the *Free Hindusthan*, and other items were found, including a notebook containing a collection of memoranda; addresses of Hindu agitators in the United States, Switzerland, South Africa, Egypt, and France; and notes on the manufacture of nitroglycerine. Upon his arrest he said, "You drive us Hindus out of Canada and we will drive every white man out of India."<sup>40</sup> In his affidavit he mentioned that he had not intended to settle when he came to Canada but merely to tour and to look into trade conditions and the condition of his fellow countrypeople. This, however, is contradicted by the fact that he was managing his company in Vancouver.<sup>41</sup>

A drive to protect Rahim ensued, with Das at the centre. Dr. Sunder Singh and Taraknath Das both began the "Hindusthane Association of Vancouver,"<sup>42</sup> whose goal was to defend and help any Hindu threatened with deportation, to continue to agitate against acts that restricted Hindu migration, to purchase land, to teach English, to care for the sick and indigent, and to go to the United States to collect funds for the organization. In February 1911, Justice Denis Murphy of Vancouver ruled that Rahim could stay in Canada. Rahim also began the United India League in Vancouver, which published the *Hindustanee*, a 1914 English-language paper to which Taraknath Das contributed regularly.<sup>43</sup> Rahim was active in the Socialist Party of Canada (SPC), becoming a member of the Vancouver-based Dominion Executive Committee in 1912 or 1913 and offering offices for the publication of the *Western Clarion*, the SPC's newspaper. He was a contemporary of James Teit, the ethnographer,

<sup>40</sup> IOR/L/P&J/12/1, file 126, 13, "Indian Agitation in America, circular no. 12 of 1912," 32–33.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> See Brij Lal, "East Indians in British Columbia, 1904–14: An Historical Study in Growth and Integration" (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1976), app., 171–77, for a reproduction of the rules and regulations of the association, as of 23 August 1910.

<sup>43</sup> On the topic of newspapers and publications in Vancouver and Victoria in the 1908–14 period, see Harold A. Gould, *Sikhs, Swamis, Students, and Spies: The India Lobby in the United States* (Delhi: Sage, 2006), 133.

activist, and socialist who was active in the Allied Tribes, an Indigenous rights organization founded in 1916.<sup>44</sup>

The governor of British Honduras, Colonel E.J. Swayne, was well aware of the entire network of Indian revolutionaries, and he drafted a confidential memorandum about East Indians in British Columbia. He ends this memorandum by stating: "It is a matter of considerable interest to trace the growth of a combined sentiment between the various classes of Hindus in Vancouver. They have coalesced from the common need of protection against the hostility of white labour, and Punjabi Mohamedans, Sikhs, and Hindus from the Punjab, Brahmins from the North-Western Provinces, and from Lower Bengal, have been brought together in a way that could not have happened in India."<sup>45</sup> Vancouver was the physical location of this growing sentiment, and Das a central figure in its production.

From 1911, others came to the Pacific Northwest, forming a broader pan-American Trans-Pacific network of South Asian anticolonial activism. In 1910, Das entered the University of Washington and joined a small but growing group of Indian students, and he earned a master's degree in 1911.<sup>46</sup> In that year, Har Dayal, a rising nationalist with stellar academic credentials and networks in Oxford and Paris, entered the United States to work as a lecturer in philosophy at Stanford University. Soon after his entry into the country, he began to work with established activists like Das, Ramnath Puri, and Teja Singh, and he proposed a new organization, the Hindustani Association of the Pacific Coast, an update on earlier associations that had originated in places like Vancouver, Astoria, and Seattle. In November 1913, these revolutionaries then named this new organization the Ghadar (Mutiny) Party, which

<sup>44</sup> For a recent analysis of Teit, see Wendy Wickwire, *At the Bridge: James Teit and the Anthropology of Belonging* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2019), chaps. 7 and 8. For Rahim's role in history as a socialist, see Peter Campbell, "East Meets Left: South Asian Militants and the Socialist Party of Canada in British Columbia, 1904–14," *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 20 (Fall 1999): 35–65. Regarding James Teit's history as a socialist, see Peter Campbell, "Not as a White Man, Not as a Sojourner': James A. Teit and the Fight for Native Rights in British Columbia, 1884–1922," *Left History* 2, no. 2 (1994): 37–57.

<sup>45</sup> IOR/L/P&J/6/1137, file 320/1909, "Confidential Memorandum on Matters Affecting the East Indian Community in British Columbia," by Colonel E.J. Swayne.

<sup>46</sup> Fellow students included Joginder Chander Misrow, who also worked for the US Immigration and Naturalization Service and who also spent time in the Bay Area, earning a master's degree at Stanford University in 1915. His thesis, "East Indian Immigration on the Pacific Coast," examines the various reasons for and politics of immigration from India at the time and argues against anti-immigration forces seeking to curb Asian Indian entry into the United States. See Amy Bhatt and Nalini Iyer, *Roots and Reflections: South Asians in the Pacific Northwest* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014), especially chap. 1, "Finding Traces of Our Existence Here: Pre-World War Two South Asian Migrations."



sought to overthrow the British Empire through armed revolution. The first issue of its newspaper, the *Ghadar*, was published in Urdu on 1 November 1913 in San Francisco. The lead column's position was not ambiguous: "Today begins, in a foreign country, a war against the British Raj. What is our name? Mutiny. What is our work? Mutiny ... Why? Because the people can no longer bear oppression and tyranny practiced under British rule and are ready to fight and die for freedom." By 1914, the party began to publish revolutionary pamphlets and poems as well as to reprint and circulate publications sympathetic to its cause, such as William Jennings Bryan's *British Rule in India*. At the start of the First World War, the party claimed thousands of members throughout the world, including Vancouver, Victoria, Portland, Astoria, Stockton, Hong Kong, and Shanghai. Additionally, the party began circulating twenty-five hundred copies of the *Ghadar* in Gurumukhi and twenty-two hundred in Urdu each week. Within six months the paper had reached India, China, Japan, Manila, Sumatra, Fiji, Java, Singapore, Egypt, Paris, South Africa, British East Africa, and Panama.

The party was increasingly infiltrated by a range of authorities, including William Hopkinson, the Anglo-Indian immigration inspector who had been tracking Das's movements since 1908. In January 1914, Das submitted his third, and this time successful, application for US citizenship in San Francisco. Despite Hopkinson trying his best to declare Das an anarchist and to alert local authorities to the dangers he posed to the United States, Das received his citizenship in June of that year. In many confidential letters to officials in the US State Department and to his superiors in the British Empire, Hopkinson constantly cited Das's citizenship as a source of potential trouble as he feared that he would be able to publish his newspapers and organize Indians for anticolonial activities under the protection of American citizenship.<sup>47</sup> Though Das assisted with Ghadar publications and worked closely with several crucial Ghadarites, such as Har Dayal, Ram Chandra, and Sohan Singh Bakna, he was not a formal member.

Just before the Ghadar Party formed in San Francisco, in October 1913, the steamship *Panama Maru* arrived in Victoria carrying fifty-six passengers from India. A group of immigration officials led by Hopkinson to prevent them from making entry, as well as a group of local Sikhs to help them settle in Canada, arrived at the docks. Local police prevented the group of Sikhs from having any contact with the passengers, and thirty-nine were held in detention to await deportation.

<sup>47</sup> Foreign Office memorandum, November 1916, F.O. 371/2788, file 211.

Led by Husain Rahim and Kartar Singh,<sup>48</sup> the South Asian activist community campaigned against detention and retained a lawyer, J.E. Bird, to argue the case of the passengers. In a surprise result, the BC Supreme Court declared the continuous journey amendment invalid because it did not conform to the Immigration Act. The passengers were set free. This led Canada to pass order-in-council 2642, which closed all ports to immigration. In order to maintain a system of exclusion, the government then reworded the continuous journey regulation and instituted a \$200 requirement to conform to immigration law.

This was then tested in the spring of 1914 with the arrival of the *Komagata Maru*, a steamship chartered by the Sikh merchant Gurdit Singh, which included 376 prospective East Indian immigrants. The ship arrived at the Vancouver harbour on 23 May and remained there for two months while the legality of the continuous journey regulation was challenged in provincial court. The BC Supreme Court upheld the legislation, and the *Komagata Maru* was escorted out of the harbour on 23 July 1914. While the ship was immobilized, Das received his US citizenship in San Francisco on 6 June 1914. Though he did not cross the border into Canada, as a newly minted US citizen he rushed to the town of Sumas, Washington, just below the US–Canada border. From Sumas, he maintained constant correspondence by telephone and letter with Harnam Singh, Husain Rahim, and Bhag Singh. He publicized the plight of those trapped on the ship in late June of that year, framing the struggle as follows: “[A] desperate fight is going on between the Canadian officials and negligent attitude of the British Indian and Imperial authorities on the one side and the party of 376 Hindusthanees on board.” He presented the case as an appeal to American readers: “Let us voice our sentiments of our people in North America, especially in the United States of America, that we shall not leave any stone unturned to give the Hindusthanees on *Komagata Maru* a chance to present their case before the courts of justice. To deny the right of justice will lead to the destruction of the British Empire.”<sup>49</sup>

Though Das did not get into Canada during the *Komagata Maru* affair, he was in touch with many of his comrades who had been active in Canada since his *Free Hindusthan* days. On 16 July 1914, he met Balwant Singh, Bhag Singh, Harnam Singh, and Mewa Singh in Sumas as they had crossed the border (with permission) to meet him to “discuss

<sup>48</sup> For a brief while, Kartar Singh also published the Gurmukhi paper *Sansar*, translated into English and referred to in many of the intelligence files of the era.

<sup>49</sup> Cited in Mukherjee, *Taraknath Das*, 57.

the transfer of certain properties.”<sup>50</sup> When the members of the group arrived, Taraknath accompanied them to a hardware store where they bought guns and ammunition, and Mewa Singh bought a knife. Mewa Singh returned to Vancouver alone and was stopped and searched by a provincial constable, who then alerted the US authorities that his associates were then in the United States with Das. Soon the police appeared at the hotel in Sumas where they were located, and they were all arrested. Das, from jail in Sumas, wrote a telegram to the governor general of Canada, demanding that the passengers of the *Komagata Maru* be allowed to land. He further demanded that all orders-in-council that discriminated against Hindus be repealed and that students, teachers, preachers, travellers, and merchants, and other non-labourers, be allowed to enter, travel, and reside in Canada without any restrictions – just like other people belonging to independent nations.<sup>51</sup>

During Das’s time in Canada from 1907 to 1914, he was linked to a broad network of revolutionaries in North America, including Surendramohan Bose, Sarangadhar Das, Adhar Chandra Laskar, and Harnam Singh, all key protagonists who were being monitored by the British authorities. Vancouver Island was where Das connected to Guru Ditta Kumar and Harnam Singh, both of whom worked in the Swadesh Sevak Home in Vancouver. Das’s and Kumar’s Victoria grocery store became an important depot for Ghadar Party activity. The evidence from the store was later used to convict the Ghadarite Harnam Singh in the Mandalay Conspiracy Case, resulting in his execution. Clearly, Vancouver Island was an important node in the early twentieth-century networks of Indian revolutionaries in the Trans-Pacific region.

## CONCLUSION

Das’s life and work bring to light the lives of individuals at the edges of the empires of their times, fighting for a cause relating to a distant place, while embroiled in, and consumed by, the politics of a local place. His life and times in the BC borderlands sit alongside those of others working for comparable goals in other places. Several others, like Mohandas Gandhi in South Africa, also inhabited the expatriate patriot habitus. Har Dayal, another US-based expatriate patriot, entered the United States at a pivotal moment in 1911 and led efforts to create what became the Ghadar Party. Shyamji Krishnavarma, based in Paris for much of the time period, edited and promoted the *Indian Sociologist*,

<sup>50</sup> Mukherjee, *Taraknath Das*, 57.

<sup>51</sup> This account is taken from Ker, *Political Trouble in India*, 244; and Mukherjee, *Taraknath Das*, 58–59.

a key publication that inspired Das in the making of *Free Hindusthan*. Finally, Bhai Parmanand, the Arya Samaj activist and reformer, visited Har Dayal in San Francisco and also promoted aspects of religious reform and Indian independence in Guyana during this period.

Within this geography of expatriate patriots, the anticolonial borderlands appeared on Indigenous territory in the traditional and ancestral lands of the Lekwungen and WSÁNEĆ in Victoria, and on Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh, and Squamish territory in Vancouver. As Das appeared on the radar of British imperial intelligence in the 1910s, Indigenous peoples were organizing across their own borders. This process would lead to the formation of the Allied Tribes of BC in 1916, in which non-Indigenous activist and socialist James Teit played a key role, just as South Asian migrants in British Columbia were increasing in number and organizing on political grounds. The ferment in this era was related to the particular politics of this coastal space as there were forty thousand Indigenous and Chinese in British Columbia when it joined Confederation in 1871 and only ten thousand whites. This prompted the all-white legislature to disenfranchise Indigenous peoples and Chinese in 1872, refuse to negotiate treaties with Indigenous peoples, and foment anti-Asian immigration measures. It is this nurturing of white supremacy that helped provoke the anti-racist and anticolonial nature of the South Asian political movements in this province.

Though there are very few documented interactions between migrants like Das and Indigenous peoples, the entire region comprised a significant node in the growing world of anticolonial Indian nationalism. The various organizations created by Das on behalf of South Asian migrants in the Pacific Northwest comprised “the first unit of a common programme undertaken by his compatriots (Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims).”<sup>52</sup> The recognition of this history places British Columbia within a global framework, showing how intertwined was the history of settler colonialism and Asian migration in the early twentieth century. The Trans-Pacific served as a site of multiple histories of movement and encounter, and for Das it “opened pathways of migration that connected Asia to the Americas and invited new itineraries and possibilities for self-determination.”<sup>53</sup> Following the work of Renisa Mawani,<sup>54</sup> migrants in various parts of the British Empire’s dominions (such as South Africa and Canada) engaged with, and at times reinforced, the racial taxonomies of modern empire through

<sup>52</sup> Prithwindra Mukherjee, *The Intellectual Roots of India’s Freedom Struggle (1893–1918)* (New York: Routledge, 2018), e-book edition, n.p.

<sup>53</sup> Renisa Mawani, *Across Oceans of Law: The Komagata Maru and Jurisdiction in the Time of Empire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 19.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, especially chap. 4, “Anticolonial Vernaculars of Indigeneity,” 152–87.

various references to indigeneity. They also, however, engaged in new kinds of politics that led some in India to recognize Indigenous peoples as the original inhabitants of settler colonies such as Canada. Das's movements and politics emerged just as these new developments – such as the *Komagata Maru* incident and the rising politics of immigration restrictions – circulated between India and various parts of the British Empire.

Das is part of what Mawani terms a “transoceanic vernacular” that differentiated between “Indigenous” and “migrant.” Such a differentiation, Mawani argues, is due to the complicated politics of race that developed at the intersection of new patterns of Asian migration and an awareness (though limited and filtered by British imperial logics) of Indigenous peoples and a contestation of white settler claims to Indigenous lands.<sup>55</sup>

Das remains a central historical figure as he offers the first example in Canada of this sort of racial formation: he worked for the US Immigration and Naturalization Service in Vancouver, applied and argued for US citizenship, and worked on behalf of the passengers of the *Komagata Maru*. He also exemplifies how the borderlands space between British Columbia, Washington, and Oregon comprised a political landscape for the growing numbers of South Asian migrants to the region. The ability to traverse one sort of settler state formation (i.e., the United States) for another (i.e., Canada) proved instrumental for Das's politics of nationalist organizing in the years before the Great War.

Relations between Indigenous peoples and Asian migrants in Canada may be assessed from a variety of perspectives.<sup>56</sup> Das's anticolonial politics may be the grounds for the politics of solidarity between Indigenous peoples and migrants within imperial and/or national systems. Recent critical scholars, such as Rita Dhamoon and Nishant Upadhyaya, seek to problematize settler colonial studies by exposing and interrogating the role of migrants within a broader framework of dispossession and violence.<sup>57</sup> A study of Das shows how the history of Indian migration

<sup>55</sup> See Mawani, *Across Oceans of Law*, chap. 4.

<sup>56</sup> Key touchstones in this line of inquiry, linking Asian migrations, settler colonialism, and dispossession of Indigenous peoples, include Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua, “Decolonizing Racism,” *Social Justice* 32, no. 4 (2005): 120–43, which argues that immigrants of colour to settler colonial states, including a range of differentiation via class, origin, and relations to the state, occupy the structural role of settler. A response from Nandita Sharma and Cynthia Wright, “Decolonizing Resistance, Challenging Colonial States,” *Social Justice* 35, no. 3 (2008–09): 120–38, offers a different view, questioning the notion that all migrants belong to the category of settler and also interrogating the grounds of nationalisms based on notions of indigeneity.

<sup>57</sup> See Rita Dhamoon's contributions to the multi-authored essay with Corey Snelgrove and Jeff Cornassel, “Unsettling Settler Colonialism: The Discourse and Politics of Settlers, and Solidarity with Indigenous Nations,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 3, no. 2 (2014): 1–32; as well as Nishant Upadhyaya, “Making of ‘Model’ South Asians on the Tar Sands: Intersections of Race, Caste, and Indigeneity,” *Journal of the Critical Ethnic Studies*,

to North America involved not only dispossession and a link to capital accumulation but also greater global critiques of modern empire. Furthermore, given his Bengali cultural heritage and his upbringing in Calcutta-based networks, Das's life brings out the differentiation that was part of Indian migration to British Columbia. Stories of Indian migration to this province are usually told through the lens of Punjabi Sikh histories. Though acts of violence, dispossession, and terrorism certainly bring to light "pernicious continuities" between colonial and national contexts of violence,<sup>58</sup> Das's life dents a historical framework that projects nation building onto an imperial past or focuses on people who are now heroes to those living in the multicultural present. Instead, digging into the details of Das's life offers a way of unsettling histories. This is because the politics of migration and movement in the BC borderlands in the period under review were not about inclusion or assimilation but, rather, were part and parcel of a broader critique of empire. As Renisa Mawani shows,<sup>59</sup> Das's movements parallel those occurring on a global scale (e.g., through the *Komagata Maru* episode) as his politics certainly cannot be contained within one nation-state.

Including the history of Das and global Indian anticolonialism in the history of the traditional and ancestral territories of the WSÁNEĆ, Lekwungen, Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations adds to the recent work that integrates histories of Asian migrants into broader narratives of Canadian history by triangulating the corners of the early twentieth-century world, which feature Indigenous, immigrant, and settler voices. Recent work in this genre features the scholarship of Renisa Mawani, Rita Dhamoon, Nishant Upadhyay, Tim Stanley, Henry Yu, and John Price.<sup>60</sup> Das inserts an Indian anticolonial element into the history of British Columbia. This site is inclusive of entangled histories that connect Das to the local and global unfolding of white supremacy and its opposition in the form of Indian anticolonialism. This drama may be seen to unfold in Vancouver and Victoria in the early twentieth century.

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forthcoming; and Nishant Upadhyaya, "Pernicious Continuities: Un/settling Violence, Race and Colonialism," *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory* 9, no. 2 (2013): 263–68.

<sup>58</sup> Upadhyaya, "Pernicious Continuities."

<sup>59</sup> See Renisa Mawani, "The Politics of Empire: Minor History on a Global Scale," in *Unmooring the Komagata Maru: Charting Colonial Trajectories*, ed. Rita Dhamoon, Davina Bhandar, Renisa Mawani, and Satwinder Kaur Bains, 280–89 (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2019).

<sup>60</sup> See Dhamoon, Snelgrove, and Corntassel, "Unsettling Settler Colonialism"; Upadhyaya, "Pernicious Continuities"; Mawani, *Across Oceans of Law*; Timothy Stanley, "Chinamen, Wherever We Go: Chinese Nationalism and Guangdong Merchants in British Columbia, 1871–1911," *Canadian Historical Review* 77, no. 4 (1996): 475–503; Timothy Stanley, *Contesting White Supremacy: School Segregation, Anti-Racism, and the Making of Chinese Canadians* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011); John Price, *Orienting Canada: Race, Empire, and the Transpacific* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012); and Laura Madokoro, Francine McKenzie, and David Meren, eds., *Dominion of Race: Rethinking Canada's International History* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2018), especially contributions by Henry Yu and John Price.