



JAIDEV

THE MAN
FROM
BHARAT

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Book 1: Origins

First Edition

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*Dedicated to my Grandparents
And the millions of this great nation
That was once known as Bharat*

CHAPTER 1: THE ROOTS

Nobody had expected for Kiran to ever have a baby, after two miscarriages in five years. Yet, on 23rd March 1918, at 7.31 PM, a healthy baby boy, slightly overweight, with squarish cheeks and large eyes, was born. This baby was born with his eyes wide open, as if he was waiting to see what the world had to show him.

Kiran named this boy Jaidev, not because she knew this boy was going to fight several wars, or that he was going to have a heart made of steel - but because she knew of the battles she had to go through in her life, and to have this child. Nobody ever believed that she could have a child, not after two miscarriages.

In fact, nobody even expected her to be alive - she had been through famine and poverty in the first 20 years of her life, until she met Sukhbir - a freedom fighter whose only dream in life was to see an Independent India. He had marched against the British rule, been arrested, tortured and had almost died in gunfights and battles with the enemy several times. But he had made it through, he was alive, healthy and had been in love with Kiran ever since he had seen her.

They lived on meagre incomes, with Sukhbir working as a welder at the factory, and Kiran as a seamstress. Sukhbir and Kiran weren't their real names - they had changed them several times as they moved from town to town, evading capture and torture from the authorities. They did not remember their childhood, neither of them, and had never seen their parents - but Jaidev was not going to have such a childhood, they told themselves. This child would get all the strength and support from his parents, although they didn't wish a normal, or rather, conservative life for the child either. They hoped great things of him.

Baby Jaidev was unlike most other children - he did not cry, and was rather quietly observant of the world around him. His big, brown eyes keenly paid attention to all happenings around him, and he didn't crave too much attention or affection.

The family of three lived in a one room hut in a congested part of the township, in an area with hundreds of other such families, all living on daily wages, or basic incomes, but living happily. It was a time of poverty in India, with a few of the elite-class and the ruling British living in comforts of the extremes while others living in tough conditions. It was an unfair life, but there was no other option.

There was a close camaraderie between the settlers, something that would play a pivotal role in the years to come. When Jaidev was born, the neighbours had all come to visit and some had even brought sweets. Every new child in the locality was looked upon with great hope by the adults; they had only dreamt of freedom and comfortable lives, but they hoped the child would certainly achieve what they could not. Every child was one of their own.

Yet, the ruling elite were a tough lot, and slight uprisings and misdemeanours led to police brutality, arrests and job-losses, and by the age of 12 or 14, most children would lose the glimmer of hope from their eyes, and resign to a life of despondence and subservience.

But that did not stop the townsfolk from hoping, with every new child born.

Jaidev's years of infancy went without much difference, and he lived a life as normal as any other child would live - until one fateful night when he was 8 - which would change the course of his future forever.

Sukhbir had worked at the local metal factory for all his years since Jaidev was born, welding together windows and stairwells for administrative offices and expensive homes of the rich and powerful. He was a strong man, over 6 feet in height, and not lightly built, like most of the Indians at the time - nutrition was hard to come by, but he was blessed with a strong frame that stood tall even with less food. The job suited him well.

A few times in the month, late in the night, he would meet with a few like minded individuals, all of whom dreamt of a free India. There was Balbir, Iqbal and Kashyap. They didn't prod too much

about each other's past lives - they all had backgrounds that they had tried to bury, but the only commonality between them was their dream of a life free from slavery and British rule.

It was clear that Balbir had been a thief somewhere in United Provinces, Iqbal knew how to make crude firearms, and Kashyap could make bombs if the right chemicals were found.

They had met during a freedom march led by Lala Lajpat Rai, and had become close enough friends. They would meet late in the night, discuss happenings around the country, share some alcohol, and then eventually go off to their homes. Life had been tough to them, they knew the challenges of revolting against the "Raj", and they all had families they needed to take care of.

However, they were all proud men, and did not like to be pushed around.

On a regular such night, as they drank, they were seen by a passing British officer and his group of Indian constables. Four men meeting late in the night was a perceived threat, and India during the days of the Raj was a land filled with conspiracy.

"What are you doing here, at this late hour?"

The 4 men had already had a few drinks, and they were in a slightly light headed mood.

"We're just relaxing for the evening, sir." Replied Sukhbir.

"Go home. We don't want anyone grouping around here."

"But why? It's our day off tomorrow, and we would like to spend some more time here."

The officer, not used to being talked back, disliked this tone.

"You will do what I say. Go home."

Iqbal then added in - "Let us finish our bottle. We can't take this home. We'll finish this and then leave".

The Indian constables sensed a looming danger.

"Go home, don't argue back!" , one of them said, in a slightly raised voice. "Go home if you know what's best for you."

"Well, which law are we breaking here?", Balbir asked. This aggravated the Britisher, and he took a few steps toward Sukhbir and his friends, removing a baton from his belt.

"I'm going to warn you all one last time, to leave and go home", spoke the officer, with clenched teeth. Sukhbir was just as agitated as the officer, and so were his friends - it seemed their angst towards the British and slavery and oppression had all gotten a chance of release.

"If you tell us which law we're breaking, we'll leave right away", replied Sukhbir.

"These stupid Indians dare raise their voice to me ! Take these men in!", ordered the officer to his constables.

The situation escalated in a matter of seconds, and the 4 men, all much heftier than the three constables and the officer put together, had the policemen floored shortly thereafter. Sukhbir would have landed at least five solid blows onto the British officer's face, and the officer was down before he could know it.

It was a completely instinctive reaction. The British officer and his three constables lay on the ground, writhing in pain, as the 4 men ran from the area.

It seemed like a bit of fun from their younger days, and they laughed as they made the sprint towards their homes, but an echo of worry seemed to emerge in their minds as they got closer to home.

Sukhbir returned much past midnight, and Kiran was awake. Jaidev was about just 8 years old at this time, and he wasn't a very deep sleeper. The two were awake when Sukhbir entered home.

"Kiran - listen - we just had a scuffle - with some policemen - including a Britisher" , he said, slightly aggravated yet excited.

"What?!", Kiran exclaimed.

"Yes - this officer started harassing us with two of his constables, and I and our friends Balbir, Iqbal, Jaidev and Kashyap - we taught them a good lesson !"

"But they're going to be looking for you ! They could be here any minute !"

"No, nothing would happen - it was too dark for them to see anything. Let's get some rest.. Oh.. somehow trouble always seems to find me !"

"I think you should shave your beard.. that way they wont recognise you !"

"No, that'll just raise suspicions. Listen, don't tell anyone about this - not the neighbours, not your friends. Just keep it as our secret, nobody will find out."

"Whatever you say.." , Kiran replied, and they settled away for the night - worry engulfing her mind.

CHAPTER 2: INSTANT SENTENCING

It was news all over the city that some Indians had beaten up a British police officer and his constables the next day. There were crude sketches of the suspects in the newspapers, and the police were searching for the men in all settlements, slums, housing areas, factories and mills.

Sure enough, the police reached Sukhbir's factory and arrested him. He was tall and well built, and hard to miss. So were Balbir, Iqbal and Kashyap, easy to spot due to their likeness and mannerisms.

However, it was impossible to be too sure in those times, and another 10 suspects were rounded up as well.

The police were ruthless in their questioning and tactics to get their suspects to speak. All the 14 suspects were first given the "easy" questioning, but when nobody confessed, physical forms of torture were quickly applied.

Canes, whips, batons - they were all customary tools, especially in this case where a British officer had been assaulted.

The innocent were subject to the same torture as the guilty, until the guilty confessed. And yet, when this didn't work - the families of the suspects were brought in.

Kiran and Jaidev, and the wives and children of all suspects, were brought in. They were put in the same holding cells as criminals. Until the 4 guilty men didn't confess, all the suspects were kept held up, tortured, and with no idea of what their family must be going through.

Jaidev, all of 8 years old at the time, didn't really understand what was going on. Kiran tried to keep him protected, as much as possible, but this was a prison cell. And yet, he remained quiet and understanding, even though Kiran herself was in anguish.

“Why are you sad, mother? Why are you crying? You always said to never cry. Please don’t cry. This is only a jail. You said many people go to jails. It’s okay.. we’ll be home soon.”

Kiran didn’t know the wives of the other four friends, and they didn’t know her. Among those rounded up were Iqbal, Balbir and Jaidev’s wives and children, and Kashyap’s father, who was more than 70 years old at the time. The policemen continually harassed the roundups, and consistently threatened them.

“Confess your guilt - and we’ll let all the families go !”

The 14 men were rounded up all through the day and night, with no idea about the time - held in a windowless cell.

They were regularly gagged, tied and made to walk past the cells where their families were being held, to see the condition that was being inflicted upon their loved ones for their abhorrence. Jaidev saw his father handcuffed and being led by policemen, and he got up from the corner of his cell and walked to the bars - “Father...” - he almost couldn’t believe he was seeing Sukhbir in this state. And Sukhbir couldn’t see his family tormented any more.

It didn’t take too long for the 4 men to confess after being rounded up in front of their loved ones, and wanted their families to be let go, so that other innocent people wouldn’t suffer.

Sukhbir, and his four friends were given a ten year prison sentence for their act of assault against a police officer and his constables.

The courts took only 2 days to announce their sentence, and they were to be sent to a maximum security prison with all hardened criminals to serve their punishment. They were to begin their sentence with immediate effect, and Kiran and Jaidev were waiting outside the courts to see their husband and father one last time, before he would be gone for two years.

Jaidev saw Sukhbir and ran towards him, with a jump of joy, but the constables around Sukhbir immediately pushed aside the boy, and Sukhbir looked at his son as he was being taken away.

“Son, never be afraid ! Follow your heart.. and never be afraid ! We will meet soon. Take care of your mother !”

And that was the last they would see or hear from him for a long time.

It had not even been an hour since Kiran and Jaidev had returned home, sitting in sombre silence, that there was a fierce knock on their door. It was their landlord. He was a burly man, who owned over a dozen on the shanties in the settlement. He used to be a wrestler in his youth and it was an open secret that most of these shanties were usurped by him by force many years ago, via means of threatening and extortion.

“I need you out of this house. You are to pack up your things and be out of here by tomorrow morning. No criminal family is going to live in this area !”

Kiran, already in shock, tried to plead with the man. “Please, we have nowhere to go .. we have no money.. we don’t know anyone..!”

“It’s not my concern. I can’t have ruffians and hooligans living here. I have to pay taxes to the administration, policemen and all sorts of officials. If they know you’re living here, they’ll take away my properties. You have to leave!”

It was apparent to Kiran that he had been instructed to evict them from higher ups. They wanted to set an example via Sukhbir’s family that if anyone went against the Raj, they too would face consequences much more dire than they could imagine.

“Please, we’ll be good people - we don’t mean to harm anyone!”, said Jaidev, his voice pleading along with his mother.

But no amount of appeals worked with the landlord.

Kiran and Jaidev were forced to pack their things overnight, and leave in the morning.

One of the neighbours, who had overheard the entire situation between Kiran and the landlord the past night, gave them a little bit of food and a quarter of a rupee, so that they wouldn't die of hunger over the next few days, whether or not they had a place to stay. She didn't know where they would go, but she left some of her belongings with a priest at the local temple, and indeed, did take Jaidev to school the next morning as well. She then went to work.

Kiran was a good seamstress, knew how to fix clothes, and stitch up Kurtis and Sarees, but her employer, a usually kind man who even loaned her some money when Jaidev was ill a few months ago, had bad news for her.

She was let go from work because the shop didn't want to be seen associating with the wife of a convict.

She now had no job, and no place to stay. She tried to go to the only other clothing store that might employ her, but they turned her away as if she were a beggar. She knew that they could not stay at Motinagar anymore.

That afternoon, she picked up her belongings from the temple, and picked up Jaidev from school, and took the only horse buggy that would allow them to board. The cart driver took 2 paisa each for the travellers.

He was going all the way to Delhi to drop some spices, but said he could give them a lift until Ranikhet, where he was going to pick up some passengers and would not have room for them anymore.

And so, Ranikhet was their destination.

What truly surprised Kiran, and even brought a tear to her eye, was how well Jaidev had taken the entire ordeal. Not once had he cried, not once had he shown pain or even anger, first at his father being arrested, then being evicted from their home, and then having to leave the city.

Most children would've been broken by having to witness such trauma.

"Ma, everything will be okay."

Jaidev had noticed his mother's tears, and as she sat in the horse cart, which chugged along slowly in the late evening, he, this boy of only eight, was consoling his mother.

Kiran for a moment forgot all her problems, and hugged the boy tightly.

"It will, son. It will."

CHAPTER 3: A NEW CITY

They reached Ranikhet early in the morning, just a little past dawn. The driver seemed to be fully awake and alert by the time they reached, although both Kiran and Jaidev had dozed off for some minutes, or an hour, late in the night.

"I hope your backs aren't too broken, the cart can be quite bumpy along the stone roads."

Kiran smiled, thanking the driver for helping them. He could sense they were in some kind of trouble, or else why would a young mother and son be begging for a cart ride out of town late in the evening ?

“Look, behen, I don’t want to pry - but is everything alright ? You and your son seem to be in some ordeal.”

Kiran lowered her head, almost wanting to tell him, but also in fear that he too may have a negative reaction when told of her husband being a convict and in jail.

“We are poor people.. thats all.”

The driver looked at Kiran for a few moments, knowing she wasn’t telling him everything.

“I understand. Go, walk down the road to your left, and you’ll reach the centre of Ranikhet. There is a market and some commercial buildings there. You should be able to find some work.”

And saying that, the driver disappeared into the road, just as the sun was beginning to rise and shine.

Kiran and Jaidev walked down the road. Jaidev smiled at his mother.

“Ma, we’ll need to tell father that we are now in Ranikhet.”

Kiran nodded.

Indeed, Ranikhet was a bigger town than Motinagar, and with a lot more activity and hustle and bustle. It was on the bank of a river, which meant there was a lot of trade that occurred through Ranikhet. The population was close to 40,000, and it was easier to get lost in the crowd here than it would’ve been in Motinagar.

Kiran, with Jaidev along, walked from shop to shop, asking for work. Shopkeepers could see she carried a sack full of belongings and that she had either left, or been thrown out of somewhere. Most didn’t give her or Jaidev a second look.

However, on their tenth or eleventh try, Nathu, a small restaurant owner who was in need of help because his cleaner and service boy didn’t show up, offered some work.

“Do you know how to make tea and cook puri ?”

Kiran nodded energetically. “Yes, of course.”

“Good. And can your boy clean the tables?”

Kiran didn’t want Jaidev to work. “No, he..”

And before she could reply, Jaidev leapt it - “Of course, it’s the easiest job in the world!”

The owner pleasantly accepted, and said, “You’ll be paid 5 paise each at the end of the day. And you’ll get lunch.”

Kiran and Jaidev got to work immediately.

Jaidev cleaned the tables while Kiran prepared tea, sabji, puri and roti.

The customers enjoyed the food, and throughout the day, Jaidev engaged in small, fun chatter with them - “This is the best sabji you’ll ever have, sir.”

Two of the customers looked on. “Why is that?”

“Because my mother made it.”

They laughed.

The shop owner didn't mind, as long as more customers were coming in and nobody was leaving without at least buying something.

At the end of the day, Kiran and Jaidev were each paid 5 paise.

Nathu had realised that this mother and son duo were in need of help.

"Look, I've been having trouble with my cook and cleaner all month. If you agree, you can sleep at the restaurant at night, and work here again tomorrow. I can give you both a job."

Before Kiran could answer, Jaidev replied - "Of course, thank you so much sir, we'll be working here tomorrow."

Nathu looked at Kiran for confirmation. Kiran nodded.

"Thank you sir, yes, we shall work for you tomorrow."

"Great, then. There is a little bit of space in the back, for I used to sleep here before I got married. Go on, get some rest. I will be here at dawn tomorrow." And he left.

The space in the back was comfortable. It had a small cot, and some sheets to cover oneself with while sleeping.

That night, neither Jaidev nor Kiran really slept. Kiran had thoughts racing in her mind as to how she would ensure that Jaidev got an education, that she could not let him be a cleaner boy for long, while Jaidev was excited with the entire situation, and looked forward to what the next day would bring him. Work didn't bother him at all, and in fact, he embraced it.

"Ma, today is the first real job I've ever had."

Kiran paused for a second, amused by her son's direction of thinking.

"Why, yes it is."

"Wow. I wish father would've been here to see it."

Jai knew his mother was sad and was trying to lift her spirit.

Over the next few days, both Kiran and Jaidev proved themselves to Nathu, and he wanted to offer them permanent work. But he had to clear one pestering doubt in his mind. When Jaidev was slightly away cleaning the dishes, he called Kiran to a corner of the restaurant.

"Look - what is your story ? Where have you and your son come from ?"

Kiran didn't want to tell him the truth, fearing she may be considered an outlaw and outcast again.

"We have come from Delhi. My husband went to the southern states for business and never returned, and people in Delhi started giving us a hard time. I couldn't live there anymore."

Nathu stayed silent, waiting for Kiran to tell him more. Kiran had been to Delhi many years before, and if Nathu prodded, she could take some names of the areas. But she hoped this conversation would end as soon as it started.

"I just want to ensure my child can grow up to become something of worth."

Nathu nodded. "I see. You are not any criminals or thieves, I hope?"

Kiran shook her head. "No sir. We are god-fearing people."

Nathu's eyes widened at that sentence. Anyone who said they were god-fearing could not be a menace.

"Well. You can work here permanently then. Consider yourself and your son fully employed."

Kiran smiled gracefully. "Thank you sir, thank you very much. We shall be indebted all our life to you."

Jaidev missed his father in the early days of him being gone. He was close to Sukhbir, and not a day went by when they didn't do some activity or the other when he was around. One night, finally, Jaidev seemed to be a little distressed, lost in his thought.

"Ma, I miss father."

"I know, son. I miss him as well. But he only raised his voice against wrongdoing. Please believe me - your father is not a bad person."

Jaidev nodded.

"I know, Ma. I wish the British would leave our country so father can be back."

"I know, son. They will leave soon, I am sure. Remember.. your father is not a bad person, and he is not a criminal. He was being harassed by the police and he retaliated."

"But Ma, if father was right.. why did God allow him to be taken away?"

Kiran didn't have an answer. She had asked God the same question every time she had faced oppression and anguish in her life. God had never shown up and answered her prayers, and she had half lost her faith when young Jaidev had asked her this question.

All along, Kiran had just one goal in mind, to ensure Jaidev received all the education she could provide him. She had seen how the people who could read and write were much ahead from those who were illiterate. She herself could barely read, and Sukhbir wasn't much ahead either.

But Jaidev would read, and write, and learn as much as she could teach him, and beyond.

A few months after working at Nathu's, and proving her skills as a cook, she requested Nathu to let Jaidev go to school in the mornings. He would come back by the afternoon and work, but he had to learn to read and write, to learn mathematics, if he had to be anything in life.

Nathu was a kind hearted man, and knew that Jaidev was a hard working boy, who, if given the opportunity, would excel in life. Such a boy must be given a chance to hone himself. Nathu agreed, on one condition - that Jaidev would be back before noon, just in time to serve lunch to all the customers, and would have to balance account sheets every day in the evening.

Kiran and Jaidev agreed without second thought.

Every morning, with the discipline and commitment of a soldier on a mission, Kiran would ensure Jaidev was up by dawn, and was off to walk the 4 kilometres to the nearest school. It took him almost an hour to reach every morning, but on some days a passing horsecar would give him a lift.

There were over two hundred students along with Jaidev at his school, and it wasn't much of a facility. The classes were held in the open air, under the sun, and if it rained, all students would be asked to go home.

And yet, all things aside, Jaidev was a smart student, and he learnt concepts much sooner than most other pupils. He also picked up arithmetic quickly, and within an year, he was more educated than most adults in his neighbourhood.

While Jaidev stayed at school, Kiran would work at the restaurant, doing dual duties of cooking and serving food, although Nathu would help sometimes.

It was not an easy life, but nobody had an easy life in those days. Kiran consoled herself with the singular goal of having to raise Jaidev to be a strong and smart man, somebody who could make a difference.

CHAPTER 4: DESTINY IS A RIVER

The police regularly patrolled neighbourhoods in those days, looking for signs of revolt, groups, disgruntlement and any other activity that may be seen as challenging the British rule. This was 1929, the great Depression had just begun in the west and any unrest was completely unacceptable to the rule.

And yet, when Kiran and Jaidev would pass by the British neighbourhoods, or those where the affluent “seths” lived, they could only see lavish lifestyles, servants and enormous amounts of food and drink being carried to and sometimes even from the homes.

It was an altogether different world.

Jaidev, although only 10 years old at the time, had a colourful understanding of the disparity between the worlds. When they reached their neighbourhood they could only see a lack of food, water, and peaceful living, with the police regularly catching and arresting people, sometimes for no apparent reason.

Some months ago, a new officer had just been posted at Ranikhet, and he was known to be a strict taskmaster. He had been given the responsibility to ensure there was complete order in the district.

In his first few months, he had arrested over 500 people, and closed down at least 5 freedom fighter parties, or at least their offices. He would arrest the suspects, and without trial or hard reason, would keep them locked up, taking away their money and self-respect in the process.

Most people only wanted simple lives, and not everyone was a freedom fighter - but Officer Dyson didn't think so. Every Indian was a potential suspect. He had even heard of Sukhbir's tale where a British officer was beaten up by a group of Indians. He would let no such thing happen again.

It was a hot afternoon when Officer Dyson barged into the police station, and started cursing at not only the inmates in the lockup, but also the Indian subordinates who used to work under him.

His young daughter, who would've been no more than 10 years old at the time, was missing all morning. He had searched for her everywhere, and had sent all his servants to any possible place she could be, but there was no sign of her.

Dyson had made a lot of enemies in his time as a policeman, and he started to fear for the worst, where some convict of his from months or years priors would be seeking revenge.

He frantically screamed at all the people at the station, before ordering the constables to go on a lookout, and notify other stations at the district of the same. An officer's young daughter was missing, this could be a national headline the next day, all the way in England.

The entire district was soon going into a frenzy.

“Dyson's daughter is missing!” , a tea seller told his customers and they looked on in awe.

“Who would dare do such a thing!”

“Oh no, this means more people are going to be arrested and beaten up.. God save our land!”

Jaidev used to always go and play by the farms and creeks after his morning lectures, when they had an hour's break before the next class would begin.

The river near the creek was of rapid streams, although not too deep. Yet, for a child of 7 or 8, it was dangerous. On that fateful morning, he was playing with a few of the boys near the creek, when he, trying to catch a rabbit in the shrubs, fell into the creek.

The rest of the boys along with him were not much older, and they had no idea what to do. They simply screamed as Jaidev was dragged along, into the water. He didn't know how to swim, and the water was too forceful for him to try.

It carried him along for several hundred meters, as he tried his best to keep his head up, until the creek took a sharp turn, and shoved him into the muddy bank on one side. He was out of half his life, but he was in his senses, and in a few minutes, caught his breath back.

He knew he could've died - it was the most primal of feelings, and he had just seen it up close.

He got off the ground, and prepared to walk in the closest direction that might take him to a road. He took a few steps away from the bank, remembering his mother's words that he must not venture into the trees and shrubs, because snakes and cheetahs lurked there. But he had no option.

“Help!” He screamed. But nobody seemed to listen.

He tried a few times, then gave up, feeling that nobody must be around.

He continue to walk, until a few meters away, he saw something that caught his eye, partly hidden by the bushes. It was definitely a hand. He walked closer, and soon enough, he was sure this was a white girl. Her leg was badly bruised, and she unconscious. He tried to wake her up, but she didn't seem to have the power.

She was breathing, but she wasn't getting up. He tried even harder, and nudged and shoved her - her eyes finally opened.

“Help...”, she said.

Jaidev didn't speak any English, but he tried to get the girl to get up so they could walk to safety.

“Try to get up ! We must get out of here..!”

The girl didn't have any strength, and it seemed as if her leg was broken.

With all of his might, Jaidev supported her to get up, so they could both walk. He put the girl's arm over his shoulder, and they began to slow walk through the shrubs.

It seemed to be the longest walk of either of their lives, until they reached a road, where some men in a bullock cart noticed the two.

The missing white girl's story was all over the town, and it wasn't long before Jaidev and the girl were taken to Ranikhet police station, where Officer Dyson awaited.

Upon seeing his daughter alive, it seemed Dyson sprang back to life. He certainly understood how so many of the families he arrested would have felt when missing a loved one.

“Where were you ! Oh dear heavens .. your leg ! What happened !”

“I fell in the river father.”

“Get her a doctor !”

In all this commotion, nobody seemed to notice Jaidev, whose arm was just as badly bruised as the girl’s leg. It took some time until a constable asked the boy - “Who are you ?”

“My name is Jaidev.”

“And why were you with her?”

“I saved her.”, he said proudly.

The constable smirked. “You..? Don’t be joking here.”

Dyson noticed the boy and asked his constable - “Who is this?”

“He says he saved your daughter.”

Dyson looked at his daughter. “Who is this boy?”

“Father, he is the one who saved me in the jungle.. I was unconscious, but he found me, and he carried me to safety.”

Dyson’s eyes widened.

“You look like you’re hurt yourself! Get him a doctor, quick!”

And so, a doctor indeed came, and gave Jaidev the best possible treatment, along with a nice lunch and some sweets afterwards as well.

Jaidev had all forgotten about how he himself had almost drowned a few hours ago. Yet, he knew his mother would soon be looking for him and he must somehow let her know of his location.

“Please find my mother - she will be anxiously searching for me at the school.” , he told the officers.

Just as Dyson was distressed about his missing daughter, Kiran, who had been waiting at the restaurant for Jaidev to return, reached the school as he had never been this late at getting back. At the most he would be back a few minutes past noon, but this was almost 2 PM. When she reached the school, one of the boys who were playing in the fields nearby told her that Jaidev had fallen into the river. Her world had come crashing.

She asked the boys to take her to the spot where he fell, and when they reached, she realised the water below was at a rapid pace - no small boy could swim through this water. But her heart refused to believe the most possible scenario. She ran around, asking people, asking for help - and a few people sympathised with her as if she had already lost her son.

It was only when she had almost given up, and she was on the main road, half-broken, that one of the local shopkeepers recognised her and told her that her son was at the police station.

“What?! Did the police arrest my son?!”

“No no, they are calling him a hero.. he saved Dyson’s daughter’s life!”

Kiran was perplexed. A few moments ago she had heard that her son had fallen into the river, and now she was being told that he had saved someone’s life. And not just someone, the daughter of one of the most powerful men in the city.

“How dare you play pranks with me!”

“I’m not joking.. go to the police station yourself and see.”

The look in the shopkeeper’s eye gave Kiran a ray of hope.

The doctor had tended to both Maggie and Jaidev, and they had both eaten. Dyson looked at young Jaidev, who was slightly bigger than most for his age, and Jaidev was equally observant of the officer and everyone around him.

When the situation had somewhat calmed, Dyson decided to understand the sequence of events, of how this Indian boy found his daughter, and what he was doing in the jungle in the first place.

“Ask him - what was he doing in the jungle when he found my daughter.”

The constable nodded. “Why were you in the forest, what were you doing there ?”

“I fell in the river.”

“What ?”

“Yes, I fell in the river and the water carried me all the way from Lal Chowk school.”

“The water brought you all the way from Lal Chowk school ? That is impossible. The school is almost 2 kilometres from where you found Maggie!”

“I am not lying.”

Dyson, although not well versed in Hindi, could understand the language.

“It’s impossible that the water carried you all the way. Do not lie!”

“See, my arm - all these bruises - I fell in the water, the rocks hit me, and I was carried by it until the water reached a muddy area, and I was thrown into the bank. I am not lying.”

The officers found the scenario implausible - but the fact that this was a boy of 6 or 7 years old, and Maggie herself had corroborated the events, it seemed the boy wasn’t lying. The entire police station was amazed by the situation, and some townsfolk were even standing outside trying to listen in to get the entire story.

A few moments later, Kiran pushed through the crowd outside and entered the station.

“Send her outside!”

Jaidev saw Kiran and jumped up. “Ma!”

“Son ! What happened to you.. don’t ever do this again, don’t ever leave like this..!”

“Ma, I fell in the river.”

Kiran hugged Jaidev as if she had found her life back.

Dyson and the constables looked at them, until one of them spoke.

“Your son saved the life of sir’s daughter.”

Kiran, her eyes already filled with tears, was taken aback.

“Yes, everyone outside is telling me the same.. please.. tell me what happened.”

And so, the policemen narrated to her the story. She was served tea and some snacks. Dyson was simply happy to see his daughter again and was busy in spending time with her. Some time passed, and one of the constables asked her, “If you would like us to call your husband, please let us know where he is.”

Kiran hesitated, and almost went white. “My husband is..”

She didn’t want to tell them her husband was in jail for assaulting a British police officer. This situation could turn sour in a moment, as it had, in many previous instances of life under British rule.

The constable sensed the apprehension from Kiran’s side. “What happened to your husband?”

“My husband is.. well.. he left us. He went to the southern states for business and never returned. We don’t know where he is.”

“What’s his name?”

“Kabir Singh.”

“I see.. Well..”

And just as the constable was going to say something, Officer Dyson and his daughter come into the room, and Maggie appeared to have been looking for Jaidev.

“Why don’t you come to our house for lunch tomorrow?”

Neither Jaidev nor Kiran understood, but the constable looked at Officer Dyson, for permission if he were to translate.

“Father, please ask him to come to our home tomorrow. We must have lunch together”. Officer Dyson could never disagree with his daughter. He loved her too much. He looked to the constable and asked him to translate.

“The officer’s daughter wants you to have lunch with them tomorrow.”

Jaidev smiled instantly. “Yes, we ..”

Kiran stopped him. She didn’t want to be too closely associated with policemen and officials, for then questions would be asked. If not now, then eventually.

“No no, we’re poor people.. we cannot come to their house”, she told the constable.

“Sir, she is saying they are poor people and cannot possibly come to your house, a home of such high honour.”

Maggie shook her head. “No, nothing like that. They have to come.”

Officer Dyson agreed. “Yes - tell them we will not take no for an answer. If the woman doesn’t wish to come, that is alright. But her son must be there. It is my daughter’s wish. And we must repay the boy for his heroics.”

And so, a time was set to meet. In addition, Kiran was given One Rupee, a lot of money in those days, along with some food for home.

It had been an eventful day.

At home, Kiran carefully tended to Jaidev's arm, although he seemed to be perfectly fine. He was in high spirits, and was looking forward to meet Maggie the next day. Kiran realised she had to ensure no one knew about Sukhbir being in jail.

"Jaidev, if they ask you about where your father is, tell them you do not know - tell them he is travelling in some far away land."

"But why, ma?"

"If they know your father is in jail, they might not want to be friends with you anymore. And we may be asked to leave the city again."

"Okay Ma. I understand."

"Just tell them he is travelling. If they ever ask about him, tell them you do not know. Tell them you here in Delhi and you've never heard from him in years.", Kiran ordered him.

Jaidev nodded.

CHAPTER 5: NEW FRIENDS

As planned, Jaidev reached Dyson's home just a little after noon the next day. They were to meet for lunch. Maggie's mother had prepared delicious British soup, bread and gravy - food that Jaidev had never had before in his life, but enjoyed nonetheless.

Jaidev and Maggie soon became good friends. She would teach him English words, and he would teach her Hindi. It almost seemed as if the great cultural and despotic divide between the two nationalities didn't exist.

Jaidev wasn't treated like any other Indian was at the Dyson household. He was given full benefits of being a friend of the family, and not a house help, or a subordinate. Dyson's wife especially liked Jaidev, because he appeared honest and more than that, he was the reason her daughter was still alive.

The Dyson's were always indebted for this - no matter what their society may tell them to believe. They too were humans and felt all the joys and sorrows a human heart would feel.

Maggie, who was already feeling alone being at Ranikhet, with no real friends, found one in Jaidev. Sometimes, she would take Jaidev on a horse cart ride, other times, they would ride bicycles together.

The locals would see this friendship, and over time, it became a sort of an example for other townsfolk. If two young children from different backgrounds could be friends, why couldn't the adults?

There were about 20 Britishers who used to live in Ranikhet, including Dyson's family. There was George, an accountant, Brian, a doctor, and Billy, Keaton, Headingly and Paul, all young engineers who were working on the building of the new administrative office. All of them were married, but Maggie was the only child amongst this entire lot.

They had always been viewed as outsiders by the townsfolk, and neither had they ever attempted to communicate much with the locals. But seeing a friendship between Maggie and Jaidev, they had begun to realise that there could be more to share with the locals than just tasks and orders.

Soon enough, they started visiting the markets, and tried to communicate with the locals, enjoying local dishes and games such as kabaddi in the process.

At home, Jaidev would mention Maggie several times a day, and Kiran, while accepting of the fact that his son was now a close friend of a British officer's daughter, always had an apprehension in

the back of her mind if her secret would be known. But several months had passed, and she had not heard of any grim news coming her way, and this was an achievement in itself.

Bhai Shivraj was an intelligent man, who enjoyed reading the Vedas, Puranas, the Mahabharata and numerous other scholarly texts. While this was a personal joy of his, to accumulate knowledge, he usually lest it be known that he truly was a learned man - to make sure he was not simply type cast as a brute or a block headed man. He was, after all, six foot four, ran the local wrestling akhada and also ran a transportation business which included over a hundred carts and five hundred workers. But his favourite past time was to read, to engage in interesting conversations and to solve challenges and problems.

And he was a man of the people. So when he heard of the young boy who had saved the life of another young girl, even though he himself was injured - he wanted to meet and at least reward the boy in some way. He went to the market in the evening and as he Nathu's sweet shop, he saw a young boy taking orders of customers. This had to be him, he thought.

"Are you the young boy who saved the British girl's life?", he asked Jaidev.

Jaidev nodded. "Yes, it was me."

"Well you a brave young man. Do you know cheetahs roam those jungles you walked through?"

"Yes. That's why I had to rush."

Shivraj laughed a bit. "Is the tea here any good?"

"It's the best."

"Well, I'll have a cup."

Kiran, who was inside preparing the food, noticed the large man who had just come in. Jaidev poured out a cup of tea from the kettle and took it to Shivraj, who calmly sat on a corner table.

Jaidev continued with his work. Nathu came into the shop a short while later - he immediately noticed Shivraj.

"Bhai Shivraj. What a pleasant surprise. You've come here after a long time."

Shivraj stood and gave Nathu a hug. "You know how it is, keeping busy with work."

"I wanted to see who the young boy was, that's been the talk of the town."

Nathu smiled. "Jaidev - he's a very good boy. Very hardworking."

"So I've heard. A few of my men have seen him working here. Where has he come from?"

"Well, his mother and he walked into my store one morning, looking for work - they'd come in from another town, looking distressed. I gave them a job here and they've been here since."

Shivraj was intrigued. "Interesting story. Where did they come from, did they say?"

"They just said Delhi. But they're honest and hardworking is what I'll say."

Shivraj turned towards Jaidev. "Hey, come here." Jaidev walked to them. "Yes?"

"They say you're a hard working boy. Do you play any sports?"

"I play cricket and hockey and football, if we can get a ball."

“Good. Have you ever done kushti?”

“No, but I have been in some fights.”

Shivraj laughed a little. “I see. Why don’t you come to my akhada tomorrow and see if you enjoy it? Kushti is one of the purest of sports.”

Jaidev thought for a moment. “That sounds fun. I’ll be there tomorrow.”

“Great. I’ll see you then.” And Shivraj exchanged some pleasantries with Nathu and left.

The idea of wrestling excited Jaidev. He had seen those big boys training with their dumbbells and weights in the north side of the town, and when he’d asked if he could join they’d shoved him away. Shivraj offering him an invite was greatly exciting to Jaidev, then.

He was at the akhada at the precise specified time the next day, right after school, at 2 PM. Bhai Shivraj was waiting for him and was pleased when the boy arrived dot on time - he’d passed his first test.

There were already a few boys of Jaidev’s age training at the akhada, and they looked at Jaidev with sharp eyes; as if they were competitors.

“Today is going to be your first training session. Let’s see what you’ve got.”

And Shivraj proceeded to show Jaidev some moves, and get him tangled with a few of the other boys. They did some basic stretching exercises at first, and then moved into sparring sessions. Jaidev had the heart but he didn’t have the skill - he was consistently floored by the other boys. But Shivraj was pleased that the boy was trying.

“Now, Jaidev, wrestling isn’t about brute force - I’ve seen you trying to use a huge amount of force to push your opponent down, or to lift and drop him, but you keep failing. You know why? Because you come with great force but your opponent just moves a little to the left, or the right, and you miss.”

Jaidev and the rest of the boys listened on.

“By moving with great force, you allow your opponent to foresee what you’re doing. But if you move subtly, like air, without much force, you become invisible - and so, indestructible. Here, let me show you.”

And Shivraj proceeded to spar with one of the older boys, who was consistently flooring Jaidev, and showed Jaidev how he could avoid the takedowns and give out his own. It was a bit too much for Jaidev to take on his first day, and his back was now hurting from all the flooring. But he made sure he didn’t let that known, and when Shivraj called him to spar again, he stood up.

At night, however, all the pain turned into a feeling of success - he had successfully survived a proper wrestling session, and he felt more confident of himself in just a day. He would go there again tomorrow, he thought.

And at precisely 4 PM, he was at the akhada. Shivraj was surprised, albeit not that much.

“What are you doing here? I didn’t call you.”, he said.

“I didn’t want to lose the practice.”

“Your body’s probably hurting. Take a day to rest.”

“You said stretches can cure injuries.”

Shivraj smiled. “Well, then, go into the back courtyard and do your thing there. Don’t disturb me.”

And Shivraj went back to the group of men he was training at the time, as Jaidev went to the courtyard to stretch.

Jaidev took to wrestling practice and he was soon there four times a week. Shivraj found in him a good student, and trained him well.

Sukhbir wrote to Kiran once a month, and he was lodged in a jail cell about 200 kilometres from Ranikhet. He mentioned that he was keeping well, was made to work hard at the jail, and he had learnt how to build wooden furniture in his time there. There were still 3 more years to go, but the first two had flown by.

He always asked about Jaidev, and hoped he was doing fine.

Kiran made no mention of the series of events with Dyson and his daughter, fearing that Sukhbir may tell someone in prison and the news may spread. She simply told him that they were doing fine, and that Jaidev asked about him everyday - which was true.

CHAPTER 6: BAPU VISITS

India in 1930 was a place bustling with political, social and military activity. There were freedom fighting groups, groups for social causes, groups for religious causes, groups for labor activity and groups for military rights. There were even several royal families scattered around India, that held considerable power in their jurisdictions.

The British had ruled India for over 100 years by now, and their power had only increased post World War 1. They held all the money, they held the resources, and they made the laws.

But there was always some group or the other that would be trying to change the status quo.

Bapu and Nehru were close by now, Sardar Patel was active in many sectors, Khansaab had a rising power with Muslim groups, and yet, the British seemed to cleverly manoeuvre all these intelligent men. They befriended the royal families, took good care of the elite and wealthy, and ensured no uprising resulted in anything significant.

It was February 1930, and Bapu's Satyagraha movement was in full force. It had become apparent to most political leaders that going against the British with offensive, blatant tactics was futile. The British were too powerful, and most followers of freedom groups were economically weak, didn't have the firepower and might to take on those with guns and ammunition. Besides, the royals and elite supported the British, for it was in their own interest, to maintain their own hold on their kingdoms.

Mohandas Bapu had come to the forefront of the freedom movement, largely because he resonated with the masses with his simple dress sense, easy oratory, and approachable tactics.

And so, he had undertaken a widely publicised, national movement called the Salt March. It was a protest against the British rule collecting tax on salt produced in India - which brought them 8% of their annual revenue. Bapu argued that salt was a gift of the earth and seas to India, and collecting tax on it was immoral and illegal, especially since it was essential to everyone in India, be it rich or poor.

The movement gained widespread reporting, but it didn't result in any significant changes or stoppage of tax collection.

However, he had become even more of a national hero, ever since images of him boiling sea water and collecting salt in the process, and then tasting some of that salt without paying a penny to the rulers were circulated across the country.

And after this major movement, he, along with dozens of his Satyagrahis, was going across the country to garner support for defiance to the government.

He was to reach Ranikhet in May 1930, just before the monsoons.

News had spread across town by the end of March that Bapu was coming to Ranikhet.

The locals had begun preparations. The shopkeepers had decided to paint old walls, the rickshaw pullers had decided to clean up and oil their wheels, the town artists had decided to learn new kinds of dance, and the wealthy were buying new clothes.

Jaidev was very excited - he had in him a freedom fighter's genes, and his father had always told him exaggerated stories of how leaders and krantikaris would be beaten with canes, whips, sometimes shot at, and other times forcefully starved for days to get them to give up their movements, or give in to the oppressors demands.

Bapu was the leader of highest stature among such men, and Jaidev couldn't wait to see him.

To Jaidev, and most other Indians of the time, Bapu was a superhero.

"Ma, I've written a poem to recite to Bapuji when he gets here."

"Really - what is it about?"

"That's a secret .. You will know when I recite it!"

"But there will be so many people there, you might not get a chance."

"I'll figure out a way!"

Maggie too had heard of Bapu coming to Ranikhet, and her father was tasked with ensuring that there were no serious happenings during his time here. He was to simply march through the market area, give a short speech, and then be escorted to the riverside, where he would stay at the lodge for two days.

To Maggie, it all resembled a fun fair, or a town circus, as would occur in England every few months. There was festivity all around, and everyone was in a joyful mood. She enjoyed being at the marketplace, and once in a while ran into Jaidev while there, over the weekends. She would buy him a sweet drink or a cotton candy, which would make Jaidev's day.

The time soon flew, and it was just a day before Bapu was to reach Ranikhet. He had already reached Devnagar the day prior, and was running right on schedule. There were over a 100 of his followers with him, and they were travelling by horsecars and on foot.

Inevitably, the day arrived.

Bapu, almost a mythical figure, was standing in person, with thousands of townsfolk surrounding him, at the city marketplace.

A loudspeaker was arranged for him to speak, and ever since he had entered the Ranikhet city limits, Officer Dyson shadowed him. And yet, Bapu spoke of how everyone was to follow a non-violent approach to ensure the oppressive regime would leave their land, so that India could be prosperous once again.

The entire crowd roared every time Bapu promised them that the British would leave if the locals stopped complying with the rulers demands - to be non-aligned, but also non-violent. In their

hearts, the citizens knew that not paying their tax, whether they were a shopkeeper or a cobbler, would result in imprisonment and in all likelihood, beatings. But Bapu's words were like flowers in a world so dry and grey, that the crowd cheered on.

After the speech, Bapu mingled with the crowd, and entertained questions from the common folk.

"Dear Bapu Sir, can you please help us get a school for senior students in Ranikhet ? These days all students age 14 and over have to travel to Devnagar to study, and it is 20 kilometres away. It is very difficult to do so every day, and most students have stopped studying because of this."

Bapu nodded, agreed, and looked at his assistant, to write down this task as a thing to do. He then looked to the local administrator, an Indian man who obviously answered to the British, and asked him why a school for the seniors was not built in Ranikhet.

"Bapu Sir, it is because most boys in Ranikhet work at the factory. They are good welders and carpenters. They can earn a livelihood by doing so, whereas in Devnagar there is no factory."

"But then there will not be any educated youth in Ranikhet at all. Please list down on highest priority to build a senior school here."

And the crowd cheered.

"Dear Bapu Sir, how can we do business with the districts far away from Ranikhet ? We make the best tables and chairs here, but we barely sell anything in other districts, such as Almora, Majuli, Kuldhara - if we can get a train station here we can easily send our goods to other districts."

Bapu agreed. However, it was unlikely Ranikhet was getting a train station, but Bapu agreed nonetheless.

Officer Dyson, along with his family, was keenly listening in.

Suddenly, Maggie, just as another townsfolk was about to ask a question, went up to Bapuji.

"Bapuji, my friend would like to recite you a poem."

Officer Dyson was unaware of this completely, and tried to stop Maggie. He knew the only friend Maggie had was Jaidev.

"No, it's not the time dear."

Bapuji requested the officer. "If someone wants to recite a poem, we should let them."

Dyson relented. Maggie screamed out - "Jaidev ! Jaidev !"

Kiran too was surprised at the intricate planning Jaidev and Maggie had conducted, to have him speak out his poem. Jaidev rushed through the crowd and was brought centre stage along side Bapuji.

"Well, son - so you write poems."

"Yes Bapuji."

The Mahatma was also a little surprised that a British officer's daughter had announced for this young boy, who looked by all accounts, a simple peasant.

"Well, go on then, let's hear it. Come to the loudspeaker."

A small stool from behind the stage was brought on for Jaidev to recite his poem. He stood on top of it, and began to speak.

*This world where we are all children of God,
Some sleep on cushion beds, some sleep on rocks,
Some dream of a meal,
Some eat non-stop,
Some walk till they drop,
Some make others hop.*

*I hope for a world,
Where every voice it could talk,
Everyone would be heard,
No words would be lost.*

*The farmer and soldiers,
They pay the true cost
But in this land of the king
The rich man is boss*

*I am just a child
So you wont hear me
But we are children of God
And one day we'll be free !*

There was utter silence in the crowd. The Mahatma stood there, unmoved, impressed that a young boy could have written this. Jaidev looked on, hoping for some reaction from the crowd - and in what seemed like the longest 10 seconds, came a loud applause from somewhere in the back.

And suddenly, the crowd roared in approval. Poetry in those days was a great means to escape reality, and this poem by Jaidev touched the hearts of everyone, including the British. Officer Dyson stood there in awe.

The Mahatma slowly walked up to Jaidev, who was still standing on the stool, and patted him on the back.

“This country needs more like you. You are going to be a great man, young boy. You will be a great man.”

Kiran had tears in her eyes and could not control her emotions.

The Mahatma’s approval in public of this young boy was to make him a celebrity in a few short weeks.

CHAPTER 7: THE GIFT OF WRITING

Jaidev was now known all over Ranikhet as the boy who impressed Bapuji, and the boy who viewed the world differently - his poem was a testament to the one-ness of all, no matter the differences, in skin colour, language, or wealth.

He was soon asked to write more poetry by his teachers at school, and the local newspaper, “Ranikhet Daily”, asked him to write couplets for them.

But Jaidev was just 12, and he didn’t view writing poetry as a “job” he could do when asked on will. He had seen the disparity amongst people for most of his life, and his poem to Bapuji was just a reflection of that. When asked to write a poem about the “beautiful sky”, or “a simple day”,

or “a fun game”, he just didn’t have the words. Only if he had something to say, could he write a poem.

Nevertheless, Kiran realised that her son had a talent, and that it must be honed, in as indirect a way as possible.

At school, Jaidev was now not only known as the boy with the British friend, but also a respected figure with most boys. Local boys already looked up to him for surviving the rapid river, and saving someone’s life, and now they had even more reason to do so. He was also turning into a boy of decent physical frame, was slightly larger in size than other boys his age, and wasn’t afraid of wrestling or tests of physical strength.

But he was also turning into an intellectual, and was well taught by Shivraj about worldly ways, not simply limiting one self to bookish knowledge or impractical approaches. After school, he would either spend an hour or two with Shivraj and his peers, or would go to meet Maggie. Usually, Maggie had some interesting news or opportunity for Jaidev.

“There is a poetry competition for students under 16 next month in Nainital. It’s at the Woodford School - one of the best schools in the country. I think you must go.”

Jaidev and Kiran looked interested, but they weren’t sure.

“But they only speak English in that school, right?”

“Yes, but the competition is open to any language.”

“People will laugh at me.”

“No they wont. You have to go.”

It was almost an order from Maggie, and she wouldn’t taken no for an answer. Eventually, Jaidev and Kiran had to agree.

Kiran had been sending letters to Sukhbir once a month, dropping them off to the furthest post box she could find, regularly. He had been in prison for 3 years now, and knew that there was no way he could contact his family, for fear that they me be ostracised again.

He was keeping as well as he could in prison, being put to work for 12 hour shifts and occasionally being whipped or caned when the officials so desired. He remembered his glory days as a freedom fighter, walking with Lala Lajpat Rai, and remembered his fateful night when he scuffled with the police officer that brought him into this prison.

What he missed most was not being able to see his son’s childhood. Yet, Kiran kept him updated with each achievement, and when he received the letter that Jaidev’s poetry had been praised by none other than Bapuji himself, he had been elated. However, he told no one.

Not being in touch with one’s family was the most difficult part about his prison time. He had gotten used to the cells, to being locked up, to being under constant watch - but it would’ve been easier if he could at least speak to his family.

But all he could do was wait for the next letter to arrive.

Jaidev had only three weeks to prepare for the upcoming competition. He didn't really know why he was doing it, but in his heart, something constantly pushed at him to write the best 32 lines that he could think of.

Every evening, after a long day of school and work, he would sit and think of the first line he could start with, but the next line would just not come up in his mind. He truly started to believe that his poem for Bapuji was a fluke.

He was walking to school one morning, when he saw a man walking in the distance, covered in a shawl and using a cane for support. He had a young boy with him, who was around the same age as Jaidev.

Jaidev used to take the same route to school every morning, but he hadn't seen this man before. It was early morning, not past 7, and he wondered who this was, for he knew everyone he would usually encounter along this route.

As he continued to walk, the silhouette of the man grew larger. He had a long beard, was maybe in his 50s, and as he came closer Jaidev realised he was a foreigner - but not one from Britain. He looked more from somewhere in the orient, as Jaidev had heard but never seen, because this man's eyes were small, and his skin was pale. The child too was from some far away land, his eyes just like the older man.

He was a few feet from Jaidev, when he said, in broken Hindi - "Do you know which way is the main market?"

Jaidev nodded. "Yes, it's down this way." , he pointed.

The man acknowledged. "Where can I get a good cup of tea?"

"Nathu's restaurant. It will be open by the time you reach there."

The bearded man smiled. "Great. Thank you."

And he walked away. Jaidev wondered who it was, but realised that since he was going to Nathu's, he would know in the evening in any case. And he went to school without much further thought, the only thing running in his mind was the poem that he must write for the competition.

CHAPTER 8: A VISIT FROM FARAWAY

The foreigner and the boy reached the market to much intrigue of the locals. Most had only heard of stories of people from far away lands of the orient, people who looked and spoke very differently, and here there were two in person. They carried with them two bags full of unknown artefacts, and steadily, a small crowd began to grow around them in the market.

Kiran was equally intrigued of these two. They seemed to be walking in her direction - it was clear they were looking for a restaurant to eat.

"Chai ?" , the man said, in heavily accented Hindi.

Nathu wasn't at the store yet, but Kiran nodded, and began to prepare tea.

"And some breakfast." , the man added, again in broken Hindi. Kiran wasn't sure what they would have, and she asked them, "What would you like?"

"Anything."

The man and the boy sat at a corner table, fully aware that they were the centre of attention and people were constantly staring at them. One of the townsfolk came up to them.

“Where have you come from?”

The man replied - “Japan.”

The entire crowd was listening in, and upon hearing those words, there was almost a gasp of awe. This man and the boy were not from anywhere in British India, not from Nepal, and not from the far away Northeastern territories, but from Japan ! A country far away about which they had read little, let alone met anyone.

Kiran brought them tea, and some pakodas. She thought it would be the most likely choice for them, and without much fuss, the two started having their breakfast.

They had their heart’s fill, and suddenly got up, carrying their bag of artefacts with them, right to the centre of the market.

The young boy took out a small box, and placed it on the ground. It was apparent that they were going to do a performance of some sort, and this box it was expected that anyone who wished, could give him money, if they so enjoyed.

The man took out a small drum from his bag. It was the kind that had ropes attached to it, and he shook his hands with great force. The drum made loud sounds and caught everyone’s attention.

“People of Ranikhet, my name is Yoshida - and this is my assistant Hideo! We have traveled from very far, to show you beautiful culture of Japan. We will be doing some performances for you, and we will create some art specially for you ! Come, come, come and enjoy !”

The two then unrolled some canvas from their bags, and stuck two small wooden stands on the ground. The canvas was then placed on top of the stands.

Yoshida took out some paintbrushes and paint from his bag, and began to draw away.

As he continued, it was clear that he was painting a picture of Ranikhet.

News of the foreigner spread across town. Jaidev and the rest of the children at school heard of them, and they, including the teachers, all left to see what this man from far away had come to say. Officer Dyson and the rest of the Britishers, along with their officials and administrators, all flocked to the market.

Within two hours, the entire town was gathered around Yoshida and his assistant.

By now, he had made a full painting of Ranikhet’s main market on the large canvas.

And then, he took out some small coloured papers from his bag, and began folding and furling them in interesting shapes.

He intricately designed the first piece, then unfurled it - it came out in the exact shape of the dome on top of Ramji’s clothing store. He pinned the design on top of the store within the painting he had just created.

He then cut out two pillars off the small coloured papers, which looked like Farid’s metalwork shop, and stuck them on the painting. Then, he made some miniature lamps that looked like those in the flower store, and put them on the painting.

“People of Ranikhet, this art, is called Origami. It is a traditional process from Japan.”

The townsfolk were interested, but not fully impressed - it was quite similar to what any of the local designers would do on top of women’s suits and sarees, or men’s vests to be worn during festive occasions.

Nevertheless, the townsfolk enjoyed, and some put coins into Yoshida's box. Some of the ladies took small trinkets and similar items and pinned it on Yoshida's painting. Yoshida bowed to the people of the town.

"And now, for our next performance."

This intrigued the people. They had expected something completely out of the ordinary from this man from far away, and while painting and origami were interesting, they weren't too out of the blue.

The man took out a large blue cloth from his bag, and asked his assistant to hold it up, above the painting, covering it completely.

Yoshida then went beside the painting, and waved his arms in a tantric like fashion. He then waved his arms and gestured to Hideo to remove the cloth, and he did so.

To the crowd's surprise, at each of the places where Yoshida had placed origami art on the painting, there sat young baby birds, chirping away.

The crowd was quite surprised. Yoshida took each of the birds, there were four of them, and gave them to children in the crowd.

"These are for you."

The crowd clapped and cheered.

Yoshida then took the blue cloth from Hideo, and instructed Hideo to sit on the ground. He then covered Hideo with the blue cloth, only his head appearing above the cloth. Suddenly, he waved the cloth with force - and the boy was gone !

The crowd wondered what happened - where did the boy go ?

Yoshida stood in the centre, looking at everyone, almost expecting an answer. Hideo was nowhere to be seen.

Yoshida smiled.

Suddenly, the boy walked in, right from behind the crowd, and everyone looked at him in disbelief - making a way for him as he walked over back to Yoshida. This truly surprised the crowd, and everyone cheered and roared. Some in the crowd wondered if some otherworldly entity had come to see them, and if Yoshida was a sorcerer of some kind.

"Do you want to learn how to do such tricks?", he asked the crowd.

Everyone replied in a loud "Yes!"

"I will teach you all. But first, you must give me one paisa each!"

Once everyone puts a paisa in the box, I will teach you my tricks.

Some in the crowd started putting the money in, while others, who didn't have any, hoped they could find some.

Suddenly - Officer Dyson and his subordinates showed up.

"What's going on here!"

One of the crowd members replied to him - "Sir, Yoshida is teaching us magic tricks."

"What?! There will be no magic tricks under my watch! Stop this at once!"

Yoshida stood up and pleaded - "But Sir, the officer in Surajkund didn't have any issue! I will give 25% of my collections as tax!"

"Nonsense. We won't have any such trickery in Ranikhet. Stop your madness. You can stay in Ranikhet, but we will not allow any foolery."

The crowd's heart was broken - they truly had wanted to learn magic tricks from Yoshida.

Officer Dyson ordered everyone to collect back their money. And suddenly, there was a quiet in the marketplace - Yoshida and his assistant had expected to make some money from this trip, but it seemed like that won't happen.

Jaidev too was very keen on learning the magic tricks, but Officer Dyson had played spoilsport. It was understandable, as the British had always opposed any sort of situations where crowds could gather and be collectively influenced. A Japanese magician would mean a heightened interest in Japan by the townsfolk, and in the long run, it could create more interest for Japanese culture and people. This was not to be allowed.

Yoshida and Hideo then went to a corner in the marketplace, and they began to make small art pieces from the things they had in their bag. They put some of the origami they had made in front of them, along with the painting.

Underneath the painting, they put a sign - "Sale - for Rs.1"

They were now going to sell whatever they could.

Jaidev immediately went to them, and his curious nature now wanted him to ask as many questions as possible to this man from a far away land. Since he now knew a little English, he was better placed than most locals to talk to Yoshida.

"What is Japan like?"

"It's a very beautiful place."

"Then why did you come to India?"

"Because this place is more beautiful."

"Really? But everything here is just ordinary."

"That's what you think."

Hideo didn't speak any English or Hindi for that matter, but listened in to whatever was being conversed.

Some of the townsfolk listened in to what Jaidev was saying. One of the men told Jaidev to ask the Japanese man what the food in Japan is like.

"What kind of food do you have in Japan?"

"We eat a lot of fish", he said.

"Oh, then you are like Bengalis."

"Yes - but our cooking is not really like Bengalis."

Jaidev translated the reply to the people around. Someone else told him to ask Yoshida what the weather in Japan is like.

“It’s warm and cold, like in India. We have summers, monsoons and winters. But the winters are colder than here - they are more like those in the hill stations here.”

Jaidev couldn’t fully understand everything, but tried his best to translate. And then, Yoshida said-

“Well people, I hope you are going to buy something. I hoped that we could do some performances for you but since that is not allowed, please buy some of work, so that we have enough money to go to the next town.”

A few of the townsfolk came forward and bought some art from Yoshida, but it was just a few paise of work.

And then, Kishore, the fattest man in the town and also the owner of the local newspaper, announced.

“Well, we will give you 2 Rupees - if you cook Japanese food for us!”

Yoshida paused for a moment.

“But I don’t have all the ingredients.”

“Well, consider the full market as yours - pick up what you can, and make us some Japanese dishes. One in vegetarian, and one in non-vegetarian. We have really good fish in Ranikhet, since the river is right here. Go on, we’ll give you two rupees !”

Kishore really wanted to try the Japanese style of cooking.

Yoshida agreed to cook enough food for 20 people, and the next day, names were to be drawn from chits as to who would get to eat the food. Since it was Kishore’s idea, and since he was paying the 2 Rupees, he would get a meal by default. The rest would have to be lucky enough to have their name drawn out.

Jaidev, being the default translator, had become somewhat friendly with Yoshida by the evening. He wanted to learn as much as possible from Yoshida, for he may not meet another man from Japan in his lifetime, he thought.

“Please, teach me the art of origami.”

Yoshida smiled. “Why, of course.” And he went on to show him some Origami techniques.

“How did you do the disappearing trick with Hideo in the morning?”

Yoshida smiled - “That is a secret. You have to pay me 1 Rupee if you want to know the secret.”

“But I don’t have 1 rupee. If I work all month, then I might be able to save some.”

“But I will be gone day after tomorrow.”

Jaidev felt a little sorrowful. “Why don’t you stay longer? Ranikhet is a great place.”

“I can’t. I have to teach the ways of Japanese art in the next town, you know.”

Jaidev nodded. Yoshida taught him several types of Japanese art forms, and some Japanese words.

Yoshida found him to be similar to Hideo in many ways, and could understand that that just like Hideo, Jaidev too was a boy who had seen some hardships in life.

“Come on - I’ll teach you another one of Japan’s offerings. Have you ever practiced in some martial art?”

“Martial arts - do you mean like the wrestling some of the local men do?”

“Yes - something like your *kushti*. But different technique. It’s called *Karate*.”

“Karate? I know some basics of kushti, but only a little - I’ve only been training for a few weeks now.”

“Come on, stand up. Hideo, come to the base position as I’ve taught you.”

The two boys stood up. Hideo first went up to Yoshida. The two stood across each other, in signature pose, and bowed. “Respect is the first and foremost point in karate.”

Jaidev looked on, intrigued and interested.

Suddenly, the two shifted into a more aggressive stance - and Hideo lunged forward a quick kick towards Yoshida, who blocked it. Hideo, in smooth synchronisation lunged forward another kick. Yoshida moved to the side and threw a soft punch of his own. Hideo moved to the left, and attempted a takedown by sliding his foot behind Yoshida’s - he prevented the takedown, and then grabbed Hideo by his wrist, forcing him to turn his back. Yoshida then locked his arms around Hideo’s head, leading to a submission.

“You’re getting better, Hideo, but you need to not try the takedown too quickly. Let it be a surprise.”, Yoshida said.

“Come Jaidev, let’s see what you got.”

Jaidev had been in fights before, but he didn’t move as skilfully as Hideo and Yoshida just had. “It’s okay, we’ll start easy.” Jaidev tried to mimic Hideo’s movements in his first fight, and Yoshida allowed him to take his time to learn how to move his body naturally. The art of fighting was learnt over time, but the measure was in seconds and milliseconds.

After a few minutes of scuffling, Yoshida grabbed Jaidev’s forearm, and twisted it, forcing Jaidev to the ground. Jaidev was not too hurt, but he was embarrassed how easily he got floored.

“You see how little energy I had to put into that?”

Jaidev nodded. “It’s all about technique”, Yoshida added.

“Come, I’ll show you.”

And they spent the next few hours that night practicing karate - it impressed Yoshida that by the second hour, Jaidev had learnt a few quick kicks and throws.

It was going to be an early morning for the three of them the next day. They had a feast to prepare, and Yoshida had to make sure he did a good job so they would remember Japan well - and also, to make sure he made more than just the two rupees promised to him. He had expected to make at least 5 in this trip, but that was a far dream by now. But he still needed to make as much as possible.

The three of them slept at the town centre that night, with beddings and sheets provided by the townsfolk.

CHAPTER 9: FAULT LINES

Far away in Sindh province that night, two groups of men, one wearing saffron colours, and another wearing green, had clashed. They had beaten each other up using sticks and stones, and each group wanted the other to move out of a new market and trade ground.

And yet, it wasn't the business owners and traders who had fought each other.

These were men who had come from different areas, none of whom had any property in the trade centre at all. In fact, the traders in the centre were satisfied doing business with each other as they had done for centuries - it was some external force that was driving this rift, using religion as a tool to create differences between people.

Colors of ones clothing suddenly defined who they were.

The British were to resolve the issues for the two groups, and provide a way to peace, as they were the rulers of the land, no matter who the administrative government was. Since neither group could be asked to completely vacate the market (it was cause more issues than solve), the market itself was divided in such a way that there was now a "Hindu area" and a "Muslim area". All the Hindu shops, regardless of what they sold, were placed in one half, while the Muslim shops were placed in the other half.

If anyone wanted to rent a space, they had to make sure that they belonged to the religion of the space where they were looking to rent.

Suddenly, the divide became so apparent in the market that customers only went to shops that they identified as their own religion. Local political leaders added to the drama, by painting their sides of the market with their own colours and religious symbols.

A difference that did not exist for centuries, where trade and business was openly done, was suddenly broken into pieces.

And this practice was to follow suit in the rest of the country.

CHAPTER 10: FAREWELL TO YOSHI

Jaidev, Yoshi and Hideo woke up early next morning. They were to cook at Kishore's home, where he had provided his kitchen for the entire preparation of the feast. Kishore gave Yoshi two rupees to buy all the ingredients as well.

Yoshi bought fish, and vegetables, and spices as per his requirements, and began to instruct his two young assistants over what to do. They prepared a marinate for the fish, ground some spices and garnishing, and cut vegetables.

Within two hours, Kishore's home started smelling of delicious Japanese food, not quite something any of them had experienced before.

The feast was to take place in the afternoon, inside the town hall. Yoshida had prepared Japanese soup, fish and vegetable tempura, a delicious tomato gravy, all topped with rice.

Twenty names were drawn from lots, and no difference was made between somebody's social, religious or economic status. Whoever put their name on a paper into the drawing box was eligible.

Everyone thoroughly enjoyed the meal.

Because Jaidev had helped prepare the dishes, he was automatically eligible to eat, and he saved some for Kiran and Nathu. Jaidev found the food delicious, and realised that tempura was not too different from the pakodas that he was used to eating, and the tomato and vegetable gravy was more or less like the curries they used to prepare.

Far away in Japan, he thought, the people looked and spoke differently, but they weren't all that different.

Kishore paid Yoshida the promised two rupees, and the townfolk collected another two for him - so Yoshida had made four rupees in the entire trip, and it wasn't all to waste. Jaidev then noticed Bhai Shivraj amongst the crowd.

"Shivraj Bhaiya ! Bhaiya!", Jaidev screamed. Shivraj noticed him.

"Hello Jaidev."

"Bhai Shivraj, do you know that Yoshida-san practices wrestling just like you?"

Shivraj was pleasantly surprised. "Why, really? Like our kushti?"

"Well, not really our kushti, this is called Karate. It's a Japanese form. He showed me last night!"

Shivraj was rather excited - "Do you think he'll show us?"

"I'm sure he will." And Jaidev turned towards Yoshi - "Yoshi-san! This is Bhai Shivraj, he runs the local wrestling camp. Do you think you can practice some Karate with us today?"

Yoshida seemed just as excited as Shivraj. "Why, yes - we have time today - how about we meet in the evening?"

He prepared to leave the next morning, to go into the next town, but as they closed down the proceedings of the sumptuous Japanese lunch, Yoshida, Jaidev and Hideo looked forward to their plan for the evening - some more Karate.

As dusk fell, they retreated to the same backyard at the town centre. They practiced for an hour or so, and Yoshida then instructed Jaidev and Hideo to spar each other. "This is your first official spar, Jaidev. Do well, and make it count."

Jaidev moved into the introductory position, bowing before his opponent Hideo, as Hideo did the same. "Go!", instructed Yoshida.

Hideo threw the same quick kick he had mastered over the several years of his training. Jaidev partially blocked it with his arm, but his arm hurt just as well. Jaidev threw a response of his own, but it was not near as smooth as Hideo's had been, and Hideo prevented the strike and gave a quick nudge of his own, causing Jaidev to go off balance, but he stopped short of falling. Jaidev returned with a wild strike which missed Hideo completely.

"Stay calm, don't rush.", Yoshida said.

Hideo pressed forward with a short strike to the chest, hitting Jaidev and almost knocking the wind out of him. He realised he had to up his game or he'd be hit again - he threw a kick and hit Hideo on the upper leg. Jaidev noticed Hideo flinching. Jaidev threw another kick at his leg. Hideo returned with one of his own.

Yoshida noticed Jaidev's improvement as the fight progressed. And suddenly, Hideo lunged forward and gave Jaidev the same back-of-foot takedown he'd attempted on Yoshida the previous night, but unlike Yoshida, Jaidev couldn't block it and fell to the ground.

"Time!", Yoshida announced.

"Good, good. If I had a week here I'm sure you would do very well. Let me show you some of the key moves that you can practice on your own, and with your friends here."

And Yoshida then taught Jaidev many of the takedowns, quick wrist moves, kicks, blocks and wrestling lifts, all through the night. They stayed up till 5 AM practicing. Jaidev wanted to learn as much as possible before Yoshida would leave.

“It’s morning already - well - I don’t think I can leave unless I get a good night’s sleep. How about we extend for a day?”

Hideo nodded. “That would be good.”

And so, Yoshida and Hideo extended their stay, and for a full day, Jaidev, Yoshida and Hideo practiced karate.

“You’re a great student, Jaidev. You learn fast.”

Jaidev smiled. “I have enjoyed karate very much. Thank you for teaching me.”

Yoshida was pleased - he liked this young man and his attitude. “Thank you for the respect. Remember, respect is paramount.” They spent the rest of the evening drinking Japanese tea, and talking, before Yoshida and Hideo finally decided they needed to sleep if they were to leave early next morning.

As Yoshida left the next morning, he gave Jaidev two interesting Japanese trinkets, made of wood and stone.

“These are Samurai stones. In Japan, the Samurai is a warrior - one who serves and protects the people. These two stones are going to bring you good luck.”

Jaidev was thoroughly pleased - “Thank you very much, master”. He liked the stones very much.

And so, Yoshida and Hideo took off, disappearing into the distance as many of the townsfolk watched.

There was a quiet stillness in the town after Yoshida had left. It seemed as if a guest who had livened the home for a few days had suddenly gone away, and all the activities had come to a stop.

Jaidev spent the evening thinking about all that he learnt from Yoshida, the art, the cooking, and a few of his teachings. Yoshida was a learned man, and Jaidev was impressed that here was someone who had travelled all the way from Japan to bring his culture to a distant land. Yes, he too had to follow the laws, and he too had to earn money to continue along his journey, but Jaidev was drawn to the fact that somebody could have a goal so big that they would travel halfway around the world for it.

Jaidev wanted to be like Yoshida.

His poetry competition was fast approaching and he had to prepare something soon - he decided it would be about his learnings from Yoshida.

As Jaidev grew older day by day, Kiran understood that her boy was more intelligent and mature than most other kids his age. It wasn’t because it was her son, and that she was blinded by her love for him, but it was because of his actions and thoughts. He didn’t get involved in petty fights with other kids, he was an able athlete, and he always looked to solve any problems in front of him - whether it was his homework, or at the cafe, where sudden upsurge in customers could deplete stocks. He was also looking after accountancy at the cafe, and Nathu decided that he would increase Jaidev’s salary by 50 paise because of his hard working and diligent nature.

Jaidev decided to save the extra 50 paise every month. Unlike other kids, he didn’t wish to splurge it on candies, or toys and games. These didn’t really fascinate him.

CHAPTER 11: SEEING THE WORLD

The competition was just three days away, and Maggie (she now preferred to be called Magdalene) came to see Jaidev, and informed him that she would pick him up in their horse carriage, and they along with Maggie's mother would go to Surajkund, from where they would take a train to Nainital.

Maggie's family would sponsor the entire trip, so Jaidev wouldn't have to worry about costs.

Jaidev agreed, but made Maggie promise that she'd let him cook lunch for their family once they were back. It was the least he could do.

Maggie agreed.

Maggie's mother gave Jaidev a dark blue blazer, neatly ironed. "Everyone will be wearing coats, so here is one for you. You are going to do well!"

They left early next morning, and it was going to be a two day trip to reach Woodford school.

Woodford was a school where the children of the rich, elite and upper class British studied. Admission to the school was strictly limited, and it took more than just money to gain entrance. When Jaidev first reached the school, he was in awe of the size and scale of the architecture. The main building was bigger than anything in Ranikhet, and the grounds were larger than all the sports fields of Ranikhet combined.

Students from all over India had come to take part in this arts festival, and looking at all smartly dressed young boys and girls around him, Jaidev felt out of place and low in confidence. He was wearing a simple cotton pant and a plain white shirt, and though the blazer looked good on him, in his heart he knew it wasn't his, and that maybe he others would soon laugh at him, or he would get up on stage to recite his poem and no words would come out.

But Jaidev had seen more hardships than any of these students, and he wasn't one to stop even though he was fearful. One by one, students came up on stage, to present their work. Some recited short stories, others enacted plays. Some of the performances were truly enchanting.

Maggie and her mother truly encouraged and believed in Jaidev, and the closer he got to his turn, he decided he would do it for them, for his mother, and for his father currently in a prison, whom he hadn't seen or spoken to in four years.

Soon, his name was called up on stage.

"Next, we have Jaidev Singh from Ranikhet. He is going to recite a poem he has written."

Jaidev began to walk up to the stage. He could feel all eyes on him. He reached the centre podium, and stood in front of the microphone. He paused for a second, and looked at the cloud.

"Good morning, everyone..I am.."

And the moment he spoke, his accented English drew out a loud laughter from the crowd. Nobody prior to him had spoken such heavily accented English.

Jaidev grew slightly sheepish.

"My name is Jaidev and .."

But the crowd laughed a little more. The headmaster of Woodford school rushed up to the stage and took the to microphone.

“Students, parents and teachers - we at Woodford school do not believe in ridicule of any sort. This young man has come to perform a piece for us. We need to respect him and listen. Anyone found laughing after this shall be subject to disciplinary action.”

And he handed the microphone back to Jaidev.

Jaidev’s confidence was shattered, for a brief moment. He came back to the microphone.

“Good morning, everyone - My name is Jaidev Singh, and I am going to recite a poem about Following your Dreams.”

The crowd listened quietly, for the mere reason that the headmaster had instructed to do so. Jaidev could still see ridicule in many of the students eyes. But he focused on the task at hand.

*There are many places on our Planet Earth,
But who we become,
Is maybe destined by birth,
I am born a poor boy,
And maybe less is my worth
I do not have much money
To buy a new shirt*

*But do not feel sorry
For you or for me
Because laughter will forever,
Forever be free
I have felt the rain and the winds
And the storms they find me
If you have smiled it through
Raise your hands with me*

*It is difficult to dream
The open eyes cannot see
If you wish to change the world
The policeman comes to beat*

*But dreams are all we have
Whether it is you or it is me
The rich and the poor
We are bound by our dreams*

*I have met a man once
Who traveled through the sea
He painted colours in the sky
He taught me how to leap*

*And one day we will fly
All the strong and the weak
But until we are there
We must always seek*

*Our dreams they make us free
We have to keep our dreams
The rich and the poor
My dreams are all I speak*

*My dreams are all I speak
These mountains are too steep
I walk a hard road
But I'll try till I achieve*

*No, I will not ever stop
Though you laugh at me
I'll go home tonight
And I shall sleep like I'm free*

*You may not know me
And I may not know you
But our dreams are all we need
What you sow
And you shall reap*

There was a long pause after Jaidev finished his last line. The crowd, which had been slightly disinterested as he had started his poem, had grown largely drawn and silent as he spoke those words.

And suddenly - there was an uproar of applause. It was first the headmaster, a prim and proper British gentleman, who rushed up to stage and shook Jaidev's hand. And slowly, some teachers came up to him as well.

Jaidev couldn't comprehend what was going on - but it was not too dissimilar from when Bapuji had commended him in front of the entire town of Ranikhet. It was as if the arts festival had stopped for a few moments, and everyone had come to see Jaidev.

As he stepped off stage, students came up to him and wanted to shake his hand - he obliged to everyone that came his way, as he walked back to Maggie and her mother.

Maggie rushed to Jaidev as he got closer and gave him a big hug. "We knew you would do this ! We believed in you all along Jaidev, we knew you would do this!"

Maggie's mother was equally congratulating, and Jaidev, in a state of euphoria, smiled and nodded to everyone.

What had started off as an embarrassment had turned into a glorious victory - even though the prizes were not announced yet, even if Jaidev didn't win, he was already proud of himself. The fear in his heart as he began had turned into joy.

Students and teachers came up to him, asking him about his current school and education, and were quite shocked when he told them that he studied in a local, open-air school at Ranikhet, and the only reason he knew any English was because of Maggie and her family.

"I am humbly indebted to Maggie, her mother and Officer Dyson", he said several times.

Several teachers, and including the headmaster of Woodford, asked for correspondence address of Jaidev - and he gave them the address of Nathu's sweet store in Ranikhet.

"Please, if you visit Ranikhet, you have to visit Nathu's sweets - my mother makes the best tea and sweets. Please, do visit us, my mother would be very happy."

To nobody's surprise, Jaidev won the best poem competition. He was given a big trophy and a 10 Rupee prize - more than five months of wages for him. He couldn't believe it - but he realised that the rich lived in a different world, and 10 rupees for them meant very less.

Nevertheless, to him it was almost a life changing amount. He asked Maggie to help him buy a gift for his mother, and they ventured into the numerous stalls selling goods at the festival.

They bought a musical trinket for Kiran, one that played a tune after being wound up. It was a beautiful piece that cost 20 paise, but Jaidev was more than happy to spend any money for his mother.

They stayed the night at a lodge nearby, and Jaidev was given a whole room to himself, thanks to Maggie and her mother. He couldn't believe any of all that was happening - this big room, all to himself, with a cushioned bed, and pillows, and a blanket - he pinched himself several times to ensure this was all real.

He was up at the crack of dawn the next morning, and took a stroll in the premises around the lodge. Nainital was a beautiful place, and he walked and shared greetings with several of the locals.

They started their trip back to Ranikhet later that morning, euphoria gripping Jaidev, Maggie and her mother all throughout the trip.

As they entered Ranikhet premises two days later, with the big trophy in Jaidev's hands, everyone started noticing. It was known to all in the town that Jaidev was going to take part in the arts festival, but nobody had expected him to win.

Kiran knew no way to describe her joy when she saw her son having come back with victory.

CHAPTER: THE OUTSIDERS

Jaidev was now a genuine celebrity in the town of Ranikhet. He was 12 years old, but he had had the great Mahatma commend him on his poetry, and further, he had won a competition where the best students of India had taken part. Not only that - he beat students who had all sorts of privilege, whereas he was just the son of a simple cook, and used to work as a waiter to support himself.

But Jaidev never let any of it get to his head.

He had seen in no easy ways how quickly life can be turned around, when first, his father was arrested, and then within a matter of a few days, they had to leave their home and life behind. He may have just been 7 years old at the time, but the memory stayed in his mind, fresh as yesterday. He missed his father, but knew that he couldn't communicate with him.

How proud he would've been when he'd find out Jaidev had won the competition.

Maggie was Jaidev's best friend, and after he'd won the trophy, her family began to support Jaidev even more. They saw in him a boy who could do well in life, and needed the right support, at the right time. Nathu saw the same spark in the boy, and slowly, instead of waiting tables, started to give him accountancy tasks, which were more suited for an intelligent young man such as Jaidev.

Far away, in big cities such as Delhi and Bombay, there were major political plays being made, with numerous figures all vying for power - but Ranikhet preferred to be on its own, not too affected by government and national issues - they were a river side town and never needed much except the simple life.

It was sometime in 1932, when the first attempt to separate people along religious lines in Ranikhet was made. What had happened in Sindh and Bengal, where religious lines dictated where one could live, work and set up shop, was slowly gaining force across India. There were several groups that had risen, and whose sole task was to ensure that people followed the diktat.

Thousands of people had been moved by force and uprooted from their homes, simply because they were of a different religion.

And during those monsoon months of 1932, the first group of Hindu and Muslim “mobs” arrived in Ranikhet. Both groups came within a few days of each other, as if on call - and their singular task was to count the number of people of their own religion in the town, and ensure the lines between the religions were drawn in hard stone.

“My dear Hindu brothers and sisters - we must ensure that we are strong for our own people ! Our culture must be preserved, and we must ensure we do not mix and mingle with external religions!”

The Muslim leader had a similar speech - “Ensure that you live and work amongst your own people, for a believer in a different god can never be your friend!”

The people of Ranikhet, having always lived in peace and in brotherhood, initially were apprehensive of these outsiders. It was already challenging enough to deal with British taxation, laws and constant oppression, and these people were now throwing religion into the mix. However, it was the poorest of the poor who first were drawn to these groups - because they offered apparent support and *Ekta* in the name of religion. The poor never had anywhere to go to - until such groups, always welcoming hands to support their cause, started showing up.

Kiran had forbade Jaidev to attend any of these “rallies”, but it was difficult to not hear of them in the town, especially since they lived right in the market area. The groups may have stayed in Ranikhet for two weeks, staying in tents not too far out of the city, having come on horses.

What really surprised Jaidev, however, was that all these “differences” that these two groups spoke of, he’d never experienced any first hand. His friends at school were all a mix of religions, whether Hindu, Muslim, Christian or Parsi, and all of them got along with ease. Sure, there were differences and fights, but none were due to religion itself. So Jaidev wondered, why are these people ranting about all the so-called differences ? He had to find outdoor himself.

One morning, on a day off from school, Jaidev slipped out from his mother’s sight and went to attend a Hindu congregation, being held just a few kilometres from the market. There was a group of about 40, all seated around a large tree. Tea was served to whoever attended, as long as they were Hindu. A burly man greeted Jaidev as he got there.

“What’s your name?”

“Jaidev.”

“Do you believe in Lord Ram?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Good. Sit down.”

And Jaidev obeyed. The leader of the group, Taran Singh, was telling a story, and everyone was intently listening.

“...so I was on the train, and the last two compartments were carrying the gold from Vishweshwar temple. I, along with eight others, were in charge of protecting it from robbers. We were equally divided in the two compartments, and had been given guns in case any mishap occurred.”

Everyone listened quietly.

“The train was to stop in Jangirpura, and it was to be there for two hours. As we reached the station, I looked out the door and realised nobody was on the platform, on either side. Now, Jangirpura is not a big station, but it’s not small either. It was very strange that the platform was empty, with not even a tea seller in sight..”

“Our orders were clear, that we were not to get off the train under any circumstances. So we sat by the doors, guns in hand.”

Jaidev interrupted. “How much gold was in the compartments?”

Taran Singh paused and stared at this young boy for a moment. “Enough to build a palace. Four trunks full!”

Everyone’s eyes lit up.

“So, anyways - there we were, protecting the gold - when suddenly - we hear a gunshot from the outside. Robbers, we thought!”

“We went into alert positions, and looked outside the window - there were at least 20 men - all with guns - and suddenly, one of them shouted ‘Allah-u-akbar!’ And they charged at the doors of the train. We began to shoot through the windows. They had guns, and they began to shoot as well. My friend Gagandeep was shot, and he died on the spot. But we kept fighting .. those infidels were not going to get our temple’s gold. Never ! And we fought, all of us - two of those muslims entered the last compartment, but our comrades Hardev and Sahu overpowered them and eventually, we killed them all.”

“They had come to steal our gold, to fill their own mosques with riches obtained from our temples. But never.. I promise .. in my lifetime, I will never allow such a thing to happen. I would die before I let anything like this happen!”

Everyone was emotionally stirred, and some even nodded in approval.

Jaidev wondered for a moment. “You’re really brave sir. But it’s strange, how come the muslims in Ranikhet, they even offer donations to the temple here. They attend Holi and Diwali with us, and offer us sweets and food on Eid. I think, those men who tried to rob you, they just wanted the gold - maybe it wasn’t for the religion.”

The air in the gathering changed. How could this young boy speak against Taran Singh ? One of the men got confrontational.

“Listen, kid - you do not know anything about life. These muslims want nothing but to hurt and steal from us!”

Jaidev retorted - “But they never tried to steal from me..”

Taran Singh stood up. “You want to see what muslims do ?” And he angrily stripped of his shirt, and there were multiple scars on his back.

“This is what they do ! Muslims whipped me for no reason, when I was in Bengal - they saw me as a lone Hindu one night, abducted me, and this is what they did! I tell you - if we are to stay alive - we, the Hindus, we must stay together!”

But Jaidev was not convinced. “Sir, in Ranikhet nobody would do such a thing to you. Maybe they were dacoits in Bengal that got you. ”

Suddenly, one of the locals, a poor man named Digambar, stood up and grabbed Jaidev by the arm. “How dare you speak against the leader! Get out of here ! I said, get out!”

And Jaidev was literally pushed away by Digambar, before he could say anything in return or have the situation escalate any further.

Jaidev reached home some time later, and Kiran asked him where he’d been. “I went to visit Maggie”, he said.

The next day at school, all the boys were talking about the visiting “mobs”. The Hindu boys and the Muslim boys, who were all friends at school, were perplexed as to what to think of the stories being told. Some of the Muslim boys had attended a similar “story-telling” session by the Muslim mob, where according to the Muslim leader a Hindu mob had destroyed two mosques where his family had perished, and was doing so all across the country.

When Jaidev told the Hindu leader’s story to the rest of the boys, everyone had a good laugh.

While young, these boys could tell that something was amiss. Maybe it was the clear water at Ranikhet, or the clean air - but the young boys, whether Hindu or Muslim, didn’t buy into the stories told by the mobs.

“I think they want to be political leaders. Maybe they want to get some votes.”

“No, I think they want money - they want us to donate as Hindus and Muslims.”

“I think they just don’t have a job, so this is what they do.”

And everyone had an opinion by now about the mobs, but none were positive. They just wanted them to leave.

For the next few days, the Hindu and Muslim groups could be seen around town, distributing some pamphlets and papers.

Officer Dyson was keeping a keen eye on the situation, and so far, there was no evidence of any violence being instigated by either of the groups. As long as there was no violence, everything was alright. He had been instructed by the higher ups to allow the groups to move around, and both the groups came with “support from Bombay” - which meant the high-command, including Britishers and Indian leaders, both had authorised these groups to roam around the country and highlight their cause.

And yet, Officer Dyson didn’t like it one bit. But he too was answerable, and preventing the groups to move around the city would have more questions asked of him than he’d like.

The groups stayed in Ranikhet for a few weeks, and then left. But it was quite clear that they would be back - after all, the groups seemed to have money, ate well, and looked fit and fine. They were being given support by unknown sources, and the citizens realised that.

And yet, the more Jaidev thought about them, the more he felt like he should do something - he loved seeing unity in people, he believed that everyone was the same, regardless of caste, creed and colour, and that all humans should be allowed to live their life freely. So who were these groups to come in and promote division ?

Every one poem that Jaidev had written and recited, every line he wrote, promoted unity.

But what could he, a child of just 12 or 13, do ?

And that’s when he did what he thought would be the most ideal, useful thing to do - to create a political party.

“The Samyukta Party”.

KHANSAAB

It was 1934, and the whole world was rife with news about wars, political differences, colonialism and ethnic intolerance. Hitler was just coming into the highest levels of power, and America was just slowly coming back from the lows of a great Depression.

In such a world order, peace didn't sell - the only person promoting peace, it seemed, was Bapu, and it seemed the only reason it sold was because it seemed to be the easiest form of acceptance by British rule. The British publicly accepted everything Bapu did, but never let go of the spoils and riches their rule brought them, at the mighty expense of Indians.

But there were other leaders in India, who didn't believe peace was the way forward.

The creation of differences between Hindus and Muslims started off as a political stunt, in many ways. The best way to gain a following was to ride along a wave that already existed - whether that was religion, material rewards, ethnic differences, such as language and state, or simply, differences in social strata.

The Ranikhet newspaper was daily filled with news of how Khansaab was growing in calls for a separate state for Muslims of India. It seemed he accepted British rule, but didn't want to share it with Hindus.

Hindus had their own right-wing leaders, and these groups were growing in power across India. The mobs that had just visited Ranikhet were an example of that.

And as a child of just sixteen, Jaidev wanted to do whatever he could to not let differences of religion or social strata come between life. He gathered his friends from school, Kishore, Farid, Karan, and Pankaj, and together they planned to share a different side of the story to their townsfolk - one where religious differences meant nothing.

"But Jaidev, how do we let people know that it's better to be friends with other religions, rather than enemies? Already some of the people stay amongst their own religion, because they think their god may punish them."

"Ram and Allah do not see any difference, Kishore." , said Jaidev.

"People shouldn't forget that they should respect other humans as much as they respect their gods. After all, god created humans."

"Yeah, but this is wishful thinking. Keep saying these things and the mobs will come slice you away."

"I'm not afraid of death."

"Well, we still haven't thought of how to promote the launch of our party yet. Any ideas, anyone?"

The five boys sat in silence for a moment, and suddenly, Jaidev sprang up.

"I got it - tell me - what was the number one thing that interested everyone when Yoshida was here?"

"The magic ? Officer Dyson would arrest you. Besides, you don't know any tricks."

"No, idiot - the food ! We may all have our differences in religion and language, but we sure love all kinds of food ! Gurdeep Singh loves biryani, even though it's a muslim dish, just like Rehmat Khan loves Kadhi and Palak Paneer. It's food ! We should organise a day when we cook food of different religions and highlight how everyone loves all food - and just so - they should accept all religions!"

"And where are we going to get money for such an event?"

“I have a few rupees saved. Also, we can collect donations in the name of our annual school day. Once everyone sees the good food, nobody would complain.”

The boys all collectively agreed that food was a great idea.

They began to go around town the next few days and collected ten rupees, enough to make food for 50 people. And then, on a warm Sunday afternoon, decided to make the big announcement in the market square, when most people would be there shopping.

Jaidev went to the centre of the market, and held up some placards along with his friends. It said - “Samyukta Party”.

“Everyone, listen up ! In light of the recent events, where outsiders have been trying to break friendships between us, in the name of religion and creed, we have come to present to you the real story, the real way of living!”, Jaidev screamed, at the top of his lungs, right in the centre of the market.

People stopped and took notice.

“By hating each other, we are only going to cause trouble for ourselves, and we cannot let Ranikhet be a victim to such madness!”

Veera, a local shopkeeper, seemed irritated. “Hey boy, it’s time for business - keep it down and stop disturbing the peace!”

Jaidev refuted. “No, this is important! Look at what’s happening in Bengal and Sindh - if we allow fake religious differences to come in between us, we will end up being just like them!”

When Officer Dyson heard of Jaidev’s outlandish idea of a political party, he first thought, “I must stop this boy, he’s going to get in trouble.”

And then he remembered the kinds of poems Jaidev used to write and recite, and the courage the boy had depicted over the years. The more Dyson thought about it, the more he realised that Jaidev was moving with a cause coming to him from deep within, and that putting any kind of stops to that would only fuel his fire even more.

Dyson told Maggie before Jaidev could tell her of his plans, and Maggie was upset that Jaidev didn’t discuss any of this with her first. She was going to take him to task and decided to meet him right away.

She reached Jaidev’s house that evening, and found Jaidev writing some posters and pamphlets to promote across town.

“What are you doing, Jaidev?”

“I’ve created a new political party. The Samyukta Party!”

“Jaidev, why are you doing this? Shouldn’t you focus on your education, to make sure you learn and progress with life ?

“I’ll do that too - but this is important ! Those mobs that came to Ranikhet to spread fear and hate, if people start believing them, there will be useless violence across the town, and beyond. We need to stop this from happening!”

“But Jaidev, you’re just 14! Nobody is going to follow your party or your cause!”

Jaidev was adamant, and he felt a little disappointed that Maggie didn't show as much belief in him as he'd hoped.

"Maggie, do you believe in me?"

"Ofcourse, Jaidev ! You're my best friend."

"No, Maggie - I mean, would you believe in me if I wasn't your best friend?"

Maggie paused for a moment. Suddenly, to her it seemed Jaidev was doing this for a mission far greater to his heart and soul than any had imagined. No matter what she said, Jaidev was not going to be stopped.

"Ofcourse Jaidev, I believe in you."

"Great. Because I'm doing this. I'm going to stop religion being the basis for fighting."

That day, Maggie, who was an year older to Jaidev, for the first time, saw a different Jai, a more resolute Jai. She saw in him a conviction that she had not seen before. Every time he went on stage to recite a poem, or wrestled one of the local boys, or rode a horse with her, she always thought of him to be just an innocent child, not much different than she was.

Today, for the first time, she saw in him a desire and force to change the world - and it didn't seem superficial.

"I believe in you Jaidev. I always will."

Upon hearing these words, Jaidev stopped writing the posters for a moment. He looked deep into Maggie's eyes - time had stopped.

He took a step towards her, and she stood there, frozen. He held her gently by her shoulders, and slowly leaned in. She didn't move - she felt him bring his face close to her's.

Jaidev was an inch away from her face, when he paused - he looked into Maggie's eyes, and she looked back at him, both feeling a wave of emotions and love for each other. He kissed her passionately, for a brief moment.

And then he stepped back.

"I have to do this Maggie", he said, going back to his posters. "I'm going to do this, no matter what."

"Yes, you are."

Kiran was completely unaccepting of the fact that her son was going to be a social activist. He didn't consider the "political party" he had created to be of much worth, mainly because all the members were kids.

She had seen enough of turmoil in her life, and she knew that it took a lot more force than a few boys handing of pamphlets and posters around town to make a change. Both she and Sukhbir had been arrested several times for such attempts at revolt, and she couldn't see her son go down the same path.

But nothing could change Jaidev's mind.

"Jaidev, don't you realise your ways are just going to invite trouble for us?!"

“I don’t care, ma. You and father both fought for freedom, and I am going to do the same - but my fight is not just for freedom, it’s for the good of all our people.”

“Jaidev, nothing will come of this! You’re going to waste your time, and also your money - where did you get the money to promise people a feast?!”

“We took donations for our annual day...”

“My God! The school will expel you!”

“No ma, nothing will happen. Anyways, I’m not going to change my mind. I’m going with my friends to distribute our pamphlets. I’ll see you in the evening!”

And hearing no more words, Jaidev left home, carrying with him dozens of pages with handwritten notes saying “Hindu-Muslim: All are same!”, “All Religions are Equal”, and “Feast on Sunday!”.

He met Kishore, Farid and the rest of his friends near the main market, and they decided to split ways to hand over the pamphlets to people.

All the boys started going up to random passerby and handing them pamphlets.

REMOVE SECTION ABOUT FEAST

“Sir, we have a feast this Sunday celebrating Hindu and Muslim food ! Please come to the main market.”

“Sir, do you like biryani?”

“Madam, please bring your family to our Hindu-Muslim Unity feast on Sunday, where we will have all sorts of delicious food to promote oneness of religions!”

Most people were pleasantly accepting of Jaidev and his friends, but some looked at them with suspicion.

“Well, what are you trying to sell?”

“Sir, we just believe that all religions are equal. And that’s why we are promoting all different kinds of food. If we can enjoy each other’s food, we can surely be friends.”

“Don’t you know that the Hindu-Muslim mobs will come and get you?”

“Sir, if they come, we’ll serve them some Chholey and Biryani. They can eat first and then get us.”

Hearing this, the cynical man laughed.

“Looks like you boys are on a mission. Well, good luck - and I’ll see you there!”

The first day seemed to be a success for Jaidev and his group. Hundreds of people now knew about the feast on Sunday, and everybody seemed to be at least vaguely accepting. They also made sure to let people know they were called the “Samyukta Party”, so that they could create even more awareness around this name as time went on.

They continued their promotions all week, and on Saturday, spent the whole day preparing for the big feast on Sunday. Kiran helped them, and they were all up early on Sunday morning to begin cooking.

Within a few hours, they had prepared Chholey, Palak Paneer, Biryani, Tandoori Chicken, Jalebi, Kheer, Pedha and Rasgullas - and complete mix of traditional Indian, Mughlai and ethnic food.

They had large posters prepared, each saying that “Hindu-Muslims are friends!”, “We will not allow religious divide!” And similar slogans, and they placed the posters around the food, so that whoever passed by, or came to have a meal, would not miss the slogans.

And as expected, within 30 minutes, there was a crowd around them. All the food was delicious, and word started spreading sooner than they expected.

With every plate of food, Jaidev and his friend’s chanted - “Hindu-Muslim bhai bhai”, and served. Initially, everyone had come just for the food. But as the time went on, the context of the feast, which was to increase camaraderie amongst the people after the “visitation” by the religious mobsters, soon started coming to the forefront.

Magan, a middle aged blacksmith, could be heard chattering to a few other people, “Those Hindu-Muslim groups, I don’t know what they wanted to accomplish. Forcing upon us their funny ideology!”

Ali, a local vegetable seller, could be heard saying, “I don’t know what problems other Muslims in other cities may have, but Hindus have always been friendly with me and my family.”

Devesh could be heard saying similar things, and so could Amir.

As Jaidev had hoped, the feast was turning into a success. And nobody asked whether a particular food was Hindu or Muslim - yes, the vegetarians did not eat the meat, but apart from that, everyone shared and enjoyed the food - as they always had, in Ranikhet. In many ways, they were happy that the mobs had left.

As she did once every few months, Kiran stepped out early in the morning to post a letter to Sukhbir. She would walk towards the riverside, and go to the furthest post box of the town, and drop her letter so that Sukhbir would stay updated about the happenings of his family’s life. A lot had happened and Sukhbir would be very pleased to know.

He was only an year away from his release, and wondered what his son was like, and what hardships his wife had had to face due to his absence. He had made good friends in prison, especially with Hardev and Naresh, two men who also believed in fighting for a free India, and hoped that they would all be able to join the cause once they were back in the outside world. Hardev would be freed within two months, while Naresh had an extra year to go, after Sukhbir’s release.

Kiran’s latest letter to Sukhbir contained all the happenings that courageous tasks that Jaidev had been accomplishing lately.

“Dear Husband,

I am writing to you today to let you know that your son has been making you very proud, especially in the past few months. He eagerly awaits your return, and so do I. I hope you are keeping well, and eating well.

*Take care,
Your loving wife”*

As always, the letter was short, and did not contain any specifics - so as to not be caught, if the letter was opened before Sukhbir got it.

He read the letter in the late evening, and went to sleep, wondering what courageous accomplishments his son had been upto.

Jaidev's confidence was through the roof with all the happenings of the past few months. He had won a major poetry competition, and he had started a political party that promoted unity, instead of division, like everyone else.

He planned, along with his friends, to take their ideas to the next town, Surajkund. It was a town about the size of Ranikhet, but it had a railway station - which meant it was going to have a lot more daily traffic, and commercial activity - a perfect spot for the next set up.

Surajkund was about 100 kilometres from Ranikhet, and they would have to go via horse cart. For this, they'd need funds.

They figured they would need at least 25 rupees for the full trip. 10 rupees for the horse cart, another 10 for the food, and 5 rupees for ancillary expenses.

Jaidev, Kishore, Farid, Pankaj and Karan all pooled in their money, and realised they had only 11 rupees amongst them, of which 6 were Jaidev's, part of his poetry win and salary of the previous month.

They would need to find a way to earn the money - and decided to give themselves two months to come up with the cash.

Kishore, Farid, Pankaj and Karan didn't come from well off families, and their parents were all working class. They had initially shown apprehension to the social and political cause their children were taking up, but eventually had given in, realising that the country needed such youth. Hardships were already commonplace and a fighting spirit was needed.

While Jaidev had had a job all along, the rest of the four did not, and hence, they too took up jobs to support their cause - Kishore and Farid took up a job as cart loaders at the riverside, Pankaj became a shop assistant and Karan began tutoring mathematics, which he was really good at. Even at this rate, they would only make an additional 10 rupees by the end of 2 months, with each of their salaries being between 2-3 rupees a month. They would still be short of around 4 rupees.

It didn't take long for Jaidev to realise that the time had come for him to take up his poetry as a daily routine as well, and since the Ranikhet Daily had already announced him as a "popular poet", he went to their office, and offered to write 8-12 lines for them every alternate day.

The owner of the Ranikhet Daily was Vishweshwar Jain, a devout, god-fearing man, who deep down also believed in Jaidev's cause of having unity, instead of division. But he was also as astute businessman, and realised that having Jaidev's poetry could certainly increase sales of his paper. He promised Jaidev 1 rupee per month, in exchange of poems every alternate day.

Jaidev agreed without much ado. He was almost embarrassed as to why he didn't think of this idea earlier, as not only would it make him extra money, but it would also allow him to promote their cause.

This was an extra 2 rupees - they still needed another 2, to ensure they had all the money they needed for the trip. If there was something Jaidev was sure of, it was that uncertainties could come at any time.

Jaidev and his party's antics had not gone unnoticed by Officer Dyson and the rest of the local administrators. Nobody really considered them a threat or a nuisance in anyways, after all, they were just kids, but they were required to keep their superiors abreast of all local happenings.

The "Unity" feast had gone down as an "event of note" in the books, and Dyson was to report it to his bosses in his next meeting a few weeks later, to ensure that they had not heard of it from other sources.

Jaidev had come over to meet Maggie on the weekend before Dyson was to leave for Lucknow, where his monthly meeting was always held.

As Jaidev was almost 15, Dyson treated him more as a man than a boy, and asked to have a discussion with him alone.

“You know, Jaidev, I respect what you’re doing, and your goals.”

“Thank you, Officer.”

“But you do realise you can’t go very far with this, I hope ?”

Jaidev was a little taken aback. There was nothing wrong that he was doing, and he wasn’t even challenging British rule - all he wanted was that Hindus and Muslims should continue to be friends.

“I’m sorry sir, but I don’t understand what you mean.”

“You know that having a Unity feast is great for the town, but all around India, the Hindu and Muslim groups, those who want to keep the differences alive, are too powerful. They have large backings and force - I know you have an ideal dream, but I hope you are realistic.”

“Sir, I hope to ensure that people are not divided based on religion, that’s all. When the Hindu and Muslim mobs came to Ranikhet to promote their ideology, everyone saw what a waste it was to believe in them - religion is good for one’s own beliefs, but disregarding another religion for your own is a way to disaster, and not a happy life.”

Officer Dyson, who had never really had a deep conversation such as this with Jaidev before, started to realise that the young boy, now almost a man, was driven by something deep inside him, and he wasn’t superficial with his beliefs at all.

“Jaidev, I have known you for the past five years. You have always been a genuine boy, and a good friend of ours. I want to do all I can to keep you protected. What are your future plans with the Samyukta Party, as you call it ?”

“You do realise that the people of Surajkund are more politically charged than Ranikhet, right? They may have harder beliefs than those in Ranikhet, and may even physically threaten or assault you.”

Jaidev did not flinch.

“Yes sir - but I have my friends with me. We can take on anything.”

Dyson let out a sigh, and then looked sharply at Jaidev.

“Jaidev, I am not going to try to stop you. But I have to report your activities to my bosses, and I cannot guarantee that they may not force me to take any action against you, or that they may not inform other groups about your activities, those who may not be so pleased with what your goals are.”

Jaidev nodded.

“However, what I can do, is I can keep it a secret that you are going to Surajkund. My advice to you is to move in surprises - don’t let anyone know what you are doing until you’ve done it. You’ve told me you’re going to Surajkund, that’s great - but don’t tell anyone else.”

Jaidev listened intently - what Dyson was saying was making perfect sense.

“Go to Surajkund, and network with as many people - and before anyone gets wind of your activities, come back. ”

Jaidev agreed. It was almost a father advising his son for very important decisions to be taken in life, and all of Dyson's words stuck with Jaidev, as he walked back to his home later that evening.

He immediately met his friends and told them to keep their Surajkund trip a secret.

Officer Dyson reached Lucknow the next day, and went to the City Administrative Center, where the state government's highest ranking officers sat. Dyson reported directly to Commissioner Williams, a stout, burly man with a decorated past from World War 1. He was a firm believer in the British monarchy and imperialism, and his beliefs and hard way of working had taken him to great heights in India. He sat with Kings and royalty, and ordered them to do as he pleased, in the interest of the monarchy.

Dyson planned to keep Jaidev's activity as a small footnote in the list of events he planned to present.

"Good afternoon, sir," said Dyson, as he entered William's chambers.

"Good afternoon, officer. How have things been at your town?"

"Good sir. We have been running things under smooth operations. Last month, we had 200 tonnes of goods come into Ranikhet via the river, of which 100 tonnes was transported to the four main inner districts via trucks, while another 50 was kept under inventory. The remaining 50 was sent here to Lucknow, to be sent back to Great Britain. I hope all was delivered with no issues."

"Yes, we received the spices in pristine packing. Tell me about local activities. How are the freedom fighters doing?"

"Sir, there are few and far in between freedom fighters in Ranikhet, as always. Not much to report on them."

"I see. But lately, I've been hearing a few things about this boy, who's a friend of your daughter's. He won a poetry competition at the Woodford school. Do you know about it?"

Dyson was a little taken aback, but didn't show any expression on his face, as if none of it mattered.

"Oh yes, of course. Jaidev Singh."

"Well then, I know the story about how this boy saved your daughter's life many years ago, and they became friends. I am not going to question why you didn't stop this friendship back then. But I also hear this boy is slowly becoming a popular figure in Ranikhet."

"I wouldn't really call him popular."

"He held a feast for the entire city, calling for Hindu-Muslim brotherhood, and you wouldn't consider this an important event?"

"But he's just a young kid."

"I think you're slipping, officer."

"I'm sorry sir. What would you like me to do?"

"Well, do you know that he's also writing a poetry piece every alternate day for the Ranikhet daily, starting this week?"

"No, sir."

“It seems I know more about your town than you do. How does that make you feel?”

“I feel embarrassed sir.”

“I would agree. Here’s what you are to do now. Every congregational activity that this boy, or anyone else in Ranikhet conducts, is now going to require police approval. There would be no social activities without police approval going ahead. Is that clear?”

Officer Dyson sheepishly agreed. He was genuinely embarrassed.

“Good. Now get back to your duties - and don’t let me hear of any such social idealism coming from Ranikhet anymore. The citizens must realise they work for us, and are answerable to us. You may leave now.”

Officer Dyson got up, saluted the Commissioner, and left. He had half a mind to tell Williams about Jaidev’s upcoming plan for Surajkund, but decided against it. The fact that he had been told this by Jaidev would raise even more questions, especially when Williams seemed to have eyes and ears omnipresent in Ranikhet relaying to him all important news. And so, he let it pass.

Deep in his heart, he didn’t disagree with Jaidev either.

Jaidev’s first poem for the Ranikhet Daily was published on the following Monday. He had decided to keep the poem non-political, as Officer Dyson’s words stuck with him, that he must move silently and secretly.

He also had read about leaders like Bhagat Singh, who, for being too vocal, had been silenced all too quickly.

Jaidev’s mind worked with such maturity that if one didn’t know he was just 15, one may have thought he was a much older and wiser man. But his circumstances had been difficult all his life, and maybe he had been shaped this way.

The poem was called, ‘The Beauty of Ranikhet’.

*Right by a river that’s coloured golden every morning,
And every evening,
There’s a city that stands like a shining light
It’s people are it’s crown
It’s roads tell a story
It breathes an air of life
And shares with us it’s glory
It smiles on every corner
It shields us in it’s armour
It fields us as our farmer
It heals us like a charmer*

*This city where I’ve grown
This city that I’ve known
This place of Ranikhet
My heart it calls it home*

The poem was published on the 2nd page, and drew a few comments from the locals - but most just side stepped it as something to read and forget about. Jaidev didn’t mind - he had a larger goal to achieve.

And yet, the low response to the poem made him realise one important point - that people have short memories. It had been a few days since their “feast of Unity”, and people had largely forgotten about it, and considered it a thing of the past. While it did have a positive effect on the people, it seemed to Jaidev that the same would have been achieved if they didn’t go over the top with the food, and simply just held their banners and placards, like the revolutionaries did.

He’d told his friends to keep silent about their plan to visit Surajkund, and carrying forward their vision of having a unified country that did not divide its people over religion was their main goal.

“See, everyone in Ranikhet thinks we just pulled off some gimmick to promote unity, and held a feast for everyone. But to us, this is not a gimmick.”

On the morning before they left, they each left a small note to their parents, saying that they were travelling and would be back 3 days later, and that they shouldn’t worry. That was all.

CHAPTER 14: SURAJKUND AND NETAJI

There were horse cars that left every morning from the river side, and the five friends had bought a ticket each for the earliest one, which left at 4 in the morning, to have at least a 3 hour headway before any of their parents would wake and start looking for them. Surajkund was about a 40 kilometres away and it would take them 6-8 hours to reach. They had never been to Surajkund before, but they only needed to find the market and set up their campaign there.

In their idealistic minds, they were doing exactly what the mobs who had come before them had done, except, they were promoting peace and unity.

As planned, they reached Surajkund by noon, and carrying their rucksacks with posters and placards, all saying “All Religions are One”, and “Hindu-Muslims are brethren”, and “Unity is Strength”, and the like, they started walking around town.

It was a new experience for them all - nobody knew them in this town, and everywhere they went, they were stared at. At first, there was hesitance in them - they were just boys in a new city. A few of the passerby looked at them, nodded at their posters, and continued to walk along.

“Maybe we should’ve brought the food.” , said Pankaj.

Jaidev shrugged. They didn’t have much to do except hold the posters and placards up. Then they decided to walk around town, holding up the banners.

“Hindu-Muslim *bhai bhai* !”

They shouted and chanted. A few onlookers smiled at them, but nobody said much. This town was colder than Ranikhet, it seemed. A couple of shopkeepers shoved them away as they passed by their stores.

“This is time for business - stay away from here.”

In the big city, they were just a bunch of kids - and nobody cared. They had painted “Samyukta Party” on their posters, and had hoped to promote themselves, but it just wasn’t working out.

Just as they continued to walk, two burly men patted them from behind.

“Hey, who are you guys ?”

Jaidev replied proudly - “We’re from the Samyukta Party - we’re here to promote peace.”

“Take this foolery away from here”, they ordered, with a strict tone.

“We don’t want any of this stupidity around here.”

Jaidev replied - “But we’re not doing anything wrong..!”

“Do you really want to argue with us?”, one of the men made a fist and threatened the boys.

“What, are you going to beat kids up?”, said Farid.

“No, I’m going to beat troublemakers up.”

And saying that, the man grabbed Farid’s collar and pushed him to the ground.

The other man grabbed Pankaj and gave him a tight slap across his face. The men then reached towards Jaidev and Kishore, and a full blown fight ensued. The five boys were against these two men, and while the boys were getting hit, they were giving back a few of their own.

Soon enough, via advantage of numbers, the boys were getting better of the two men, and one of them fell as he was punched by Jaidev.

As the fight ensued, a group of constables from the distance ran towards them and stopped the fight. Jaidev and his friends were in torn clothes, but so were the men - and every body was bruised.

“What in god’s name do you think you’re doing? And you, you’re fighting with a bunch of kids?!”

“They are here promoting political activity!”

“What political activity?”, the constable asked the boys.

Jaidev showed one of their semi-torn posters.

“Hindu-Muslim *bhai bhai*”.

The constable stepped back for a moment and then looked at the men - “Well, what’s wrong with this?”, pointing towards the posters.

The men stayed silent.

The constables then looked at the boys - “Do you have a permit to conduct a rally in the city?”

“We’re not conducting a rally. I mean, we were trying but..”

“Do you, or do you not have a permit?”

“No, we do not.”

“Arrest everyone”, the constable told his partners, and soon enough, all 5 boys and the two men were arrested.

Surajkund’s central police station was much like Ranikhet’s - old tables and chairs, lots of files, and a rustic ambience. Their officer in charge, though, was not.

Officer Headley was a very large man, about 6 foot five, and used to be a national wrestler in Britain. He was put in charge of Surajkund because he was a tough guy, and Surajkund needed such a person to lead as this town had a railway station, meaning it was a target for all sorts of gangs and robbers.

Ever since Headley had taken over, crime had in fact, gone down.

“Well well, the Samyukta Party. I’ve heard of you.”

The boys eyes lit up. Somebody had heard of them in this city, it almost pleased them !
“You’re the same boys who gave the big feast for religious unity in Ranikhet. Well then - where’s the feast for Surajkund?”

Jaidev replied, somewhat sarcastically - “We’re not cooks, sir. Our goals are different.”

“Oh, so you’re the voice is it. What’s your name?”

“Jaidev”.

“Ah, the famous poet. So we have the full lot here, do we. Or do you have more back home?”

“No, it’s just five of us for now. But we’re looking to grow.”

“Looking to grow. Fantastic. But not around here, you’re not.”

The boys stood silently.

“Do you know you need a permit to conduct any sort of political activity in this city?”

“Well, we just want to promote peace.”

“But don’t you have a political party?”

“Yes.. but it’s not registered or anything.”

“Oh, it isn’t ? Then it’s an even bigger crime you’ve just committed. I could put you boys in for a whole year!”

The boys shuddered - they didn’t think they could be put into prison.

“So now boys, what’s it going to be ? You can promise here, give it in writing that you’re to stop all such activities, or, I can put you in the prison cell with those two gang members who attacked you.”

The boys didn’t want to stop their activities - they’d come all the way from Ranikhet and had so many big dreams.

“It’s taking that long to think it over, is it?”

“But we just want to promote religious peace - all these groups keep saying other religions are bad, and the news keeps printing it, but we’re five friends all of different religions, and we don’t see anything bad among each other - it’s all lies that everyone is saying - don’t you believe ?”

“Now boys, I don’t want to get into any kind of argument with you. I’ll tell you what - I’m going to put you in the jail cell just until you can get enough time to think everything over with a cool head. Off you go.”

And the constables immediately grabbed the boys and put them in the lock up.

For a moment, Jaidev felt proud, that he’d stood his ground. And then immediately, he realised they had to figure out a way to get out of here, and that too fast.

The two gangsters looked at them from the opposite cell and smiled.

The boys huddled together - “What are we going to do?”, asked Kishore.

“Well, this police officer doesn’t seem to want to listen to us at all.”, Pankaj said.

Jaidev had decided in his mind that they were going to agree to stop all activities, just to get out of prison - but he wanted a moment of defiance - and he wanted to feel what his father must be feeling, locked up.

He looked at his friends, and said - “Let’s take a moment and catch a breath here. Let’s not appear too weak in front of the policemen.”

And Jaidev went into the back of the cell, and sat down. The rest of the boys followed suit. The policemen looked at them, rather surprised - they had expected the boys to agree to their demands right away.

But the boys just sat silently. 10 minutes passed, 30 minutes passed, and soon an hour passed.

Headley looked at the boys rather curiously. “Well then, planning on spending the night here is it? It’s going to cost you a rupee each, mind you.”

“We didn’t do anything wrong officer”, Jaidev replied.

This seemed to enrage Headley, who was already partly angry at the boys for taking too long to agree to his demands. He got up, and fiercely walked towards the cell.

“Now listen you two bit punks, I’m going to rip the skin off your face if I hear any sarcasm, or any retorts back at me. You don’t know what you’re dealing with here - don’t test me, boys, don’t test me.”

One of the constables too came forward, and pleaded with the boys.

“Just agree to what sir is saying if you know what’s best for you. Be very mindful, you’re in a prison cell. Sir is very serious right now.”

Jaidev realised he was prying a very thin line. “I’m sorry sir. Please, let us go home. We’ll agree to everything and give it in writing.”

Headley eased a little. “Good. Get these boys out.”

Just as the boys were being brought out of the cell, a large commotion could be heard outside. It seemed a riot of some sort, or a large rally had just broken out.

Loud chants of “Netaji! Netaji!” Could be heard outside.

Headley paused for a moment - “it couldn’t be”, he thought.

“Keep everyone locked up!” , he ordered the constables, and rushed outside with his team. Indeed, it was what he thought.

The enigma, the man himself - Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, was walking down the street, with hoardes of followers behind him, and a crowd building up to even greater strengths. It seemed a messiah had come from the heavens. Headley couldn’t believe it - what was this man doing in Surajkund!

The chants grew louder, and as the Police Officer in charge of the city, Headley had to stop this at once. He immediately rushed up towards Netaji, but was stopped several feet away from him by his followers.

“Stop this at once!”, he screamed.

“I’m going to arrest you!”

But nobody could seem to hear him, and nobody really cared. He then took out his pistol and fired in the air.

“Stop this ruckus!”

Netaji paused. “Why officer, why are you getting worked up?”

Headley was angered. “You have disturbed the peace of my city. Where is your permit to be conducting a rally?”

“Rally? But I’m just walking through”, he replied, nonchalantly.

“Well, you can’t just walk through. I’m going to have to arrest you as you as breaking the order of the city.”

“You may arrest me, but you can’t stop the people from taking my name”.

And just as he said so, his followers immediately screamed, “Netaji zindabad! Netaji zindabad!”

Headley was made even more angry. “You are being arrested for disturbing the peace”, and he proceeded to cuff Netaji.

Netaji grew a little impatient. “I am just passing through the city - is it my fault that my followers grant me such love?”

“Well, tell your followers to leave, and I’ll let you go.”

“This is our land officer, and my people will do as they please.”

“And so, you disobey orders again. We are going to have to arrest you if you do not disperse this crowd!”

“Do as you may, officer. My people shall not leave!”

And so, Netaji, the great man, was arrested. He was escorted to the Surajkund police station - his crowd followed him as he was taken away, chanting his name throughout the city.

“Keep quiet and go home, or I’ll arrest all of you!”

But the sight of the famous freedom fighter had empowered the people, and the crowd was only growing. It was not very often that a man of such stature visited the city.

The boys in the prison cell were eager to know what was going on, and if it really was the great “Netaji”, who could only mean one person, that had landed up in Surajkund. As the bespectacled, smartly dressed man entered the police station - they were sure it was.

“Netaji Bose!”, Jaidev exclaimed. The boys couldn’t believe it. “That’s Netaji Bose!”

And Netaji noticed the boys as well.

“Well officer, arresting children these days, are we?”

“These boys were causing nuisance, just as you are. Now let’s see, what charges shall we put onto you...”

“Dear officer, I was just passing through the city to go to Lucknow. As you know, the trains run from Surajkund.”

“And why didn’t you inform the police before your arrival?”

“I am just an ordinary citizen - why must I inform anybody?”

“Ordinary citizen my foot. Look at the ruckus you’ve caused!”

“That’s all on the people of Surajkund. Now, if you are going to keep me for longer, I demand to have a lawyer present. I’d also like to know what these children, all who look below 18, have done to be kept in the prison cell.”

Jaidev and the boys couldn’t believe the Netaji himself was talking about them !

“Those children are none of your business. And, yes, I’m going to keep you here for longer. You may write to your lawyer, if you wish. But you’re going to go into the prison cell.”

The crowd outside was getting restless, wondering how much longer Netaji was going to be kept inside. They wanted to see him, to speak to him, to hear him speak - but the police, as always, was playing spoilsport.

“Officer, I am not sure what law I am breaking, but I would really like to reach Lucknow this weekend so I can take the train to Calcutta, as my father is seriously ill.”

“You have been disturbing the peace, Netaji. I can’t have you breaking the laws. Now, you may write to a lawyer, or call for one from the city, if you wish. Until then, I am keeping you locked up.”

And so, Netaji was forced to call for a lawyer by post - a process that could take a few days. Headley then held Netaji by his arm, and brought him into the prison cell - exactly where the 5 boys were being held.

“You’ll stay here until the lawyer arrives.”

Netaji smiled. “I hope you know what you’re doing, officer.”

Headley shrugged and walked back to his cabin.

The boys and Netaji looked at each other. The young men couldn’t believe their eyes - here was a legend standing right in front of them.

“Well, boys - what have you done that brought you here?”

Jaidev immediately replied - “We were holding a rally!”

“A rally?”

“Yes ! To promote Hindu-Muslim unity.”

“That’s interesting”, and indeed, Netaji was genuinely interested. “Tell me more.”

“Sir, we’re from Ranikhet, and we’ve been seeing these Hindu and Muslim mobs and reading about them, those people who say that their religion is better and they promote violence, but we are 5 friends of Hindu and Muslim religion, and we don’t see any differences..! So we first created a political party in Ranikhet, called Samyukta Party, and then we decided to come to Surajkund to do promote our ideals, I mean, to promote friendship..”, Jaidev spoke, at a frantic pace.

“Yes sir, but nobody was paying any attention to us here, until two men came and started beating us up for no reason, asking us to leave the city, and then this officer arrested us..”, continued Farid.

Netaji couldn’t believe his ears, since these boys must’ve been only 15 or 16. But he was nonetheless impressed by what he’d heard.

“So you created a political party? But you don’t look like you’re 18.”

“No sir, we only created it unofficially, we’ll register it when we turn 18.”, said Pankaj.

“And what are your plans going ahead for this party?”

“Sir, we want to rid India of this religious division, and make it a free country - every human is the same, whether Indian, Hindu, Muslim, Japanese or British - everyone has the same problems and dreams, but only humans make these differences..”

“Why did you mention Japanese along with all the others, specifically?”, Netaji asked, curiously.

“Well, we met this great artist, Yoshida, who had come to our town, and he became our friend..”

“You mean Yoshida Himori?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Yoshida is a friend of mine. I know him quite well!”

“That’s amazing, sir. He is a great artist.”

“He truly is”, Netaji said.

Suddenly, there was a sound of a glass breaking in the police station. Someone had thrown a stone in through a window, and the crowd could be heard getting more raucous.

Headley rushed outside with his constables, and could be heard screaming to the crowd. “Go home! Netaji is not going to be released today!”

But the crowd couldn’t seem to be pacified. Another stone broke through a window.

“Let Netaji go!”

The crowd could be heard outside, and it was getting worse.

Headley rushed inside, and came to Netaji.

“I’m going to have to let you go - but you have to ensure there will be no violence, or disorder, and that you will peacefully walk through the town and be out of here by dusk.”

Netaji smiled. “It would have been easier if you had done that in the first place.”

He then looked at the boys. “But maybe destiny had other plans. I have one condition.”

“What is it?”

“You have to let these boys go with me. They haven’t done anything wrong.”

“As long as you can promise peace, I shall let you all go.”

The boys couldn’t believe it. They were being released with the great Netaji ! What impressed them more, was that they had shared a prison cell with Netaji - people used to tell such stories with pride, and they had experienced it first hand.

They were taken out of the cell by Headley, and led outside the police station by the guards. There was an enormous roar as Netaji exited the building - and the crowd saw the boys with Netaji, assuming them to be with him.

Suddenly, someone exclaimed in the crowd - “These are the same boys that were rallying for Hindu-Muslim unity!”

And the crowd screamed some more. Netaji looked at the boys and smiled. “Good job, comrades”, he said.

The procession moved towards the railway station, and the boys followed suit. Jaidev and his friends had totally forgotten they had not informed anyone at home, but it didn't matter to them right now. They were with the great Netaji Bose.

As they waited at the train station for the next train, Netaji came up to the boys and said, “So I've heard about you from the locals as well. They saw you campaigning at the market.”

Jaidev nodded. “Yes, Netaji. But we thought nobody noticed.”

“Oh, they notice - they just may not say anything as they don't know who you are.”

Netaji looked at the boys, and understood that they didn't come from very privileged backgrounds. But he was nonetheless impressed.

“I'm going to need men like you for my missions - you have shown great resolve in coming all the way here and promoting your values. Do your parents know you're doing this?”

“No sir”, they all said, in unison.

“I see. That is no issue. I tell you what. I'll come to Ranikhet soon and see you boys again. We may be able to do some work together.”

“Definitely, Netaji.”

And Netaji took their correspondence, and gave them an address if they wished to communicate with him as well. “Write to me on this address if there is anything you'd like to share - do not hesitate.”

“And leave Surajkund soon, before Headley gets some ideas again.”

Soon enough, a train had shown up on the platform, and Netaji, along with a few of his supporters, had boarded - he waved to the crowd one last time, and the train was off.

It was past dusk, and the city of Surajkund was not the same bustle of activity it was during the morning. Jaidev and his friends walked to the carriage dispatch area, and found it to be empty - all the carriages had left for the day.

They had no option but to sleep in the open that night, so they could catch the first carriage back to Ranikhet the next morning.

CHAPTER 15: THE RETURN

“I am going to beat you black and blue!”, exclaimed Kiran, as she first saw her son the next day. It was the same for Karan and Farid.

The boys had a lot of explaining to do - and their parents were in no mood to listen - until they told them that they had met Netaji Subhash Bose at Surajkund, and he'd even given them his address to write to.

“Also, ma, he said he's going to come to Ranikhet to meet us!”

Kiran, at first she didn't believe Jaidev, but then remembered that this boy never really lied. “Why is he going to come to meet you?”, she asked.

“He said we might be able to do some work together!”

“You realise Netaji does dangerous things, right?”

“Nothing is dangerous, ma, if you believe in your values.”

Kiran realised that this boy had inherited all the headstrong genes from her and her husband - and all of this boy’s experiences and actions so far had continued to prove that he was a man on a mission, although he himself wasn’t fully aware of it.

“We’ll see when Netaji comes. Until then, you are under punishment for running away from home, and getting arrested ! Do you know what would’ve happened had you been gone for more than 3 days! Where would I have gone? What would I have done?”

“I’m sorry ma, but please understand, I just wanted to do good for the people.”

“You’re 16 years old! You can do good later!”

“But when, ma - now is the time!”

Kiran stopped arguing with Jaidev and silently went to the kitchen, and proceeded to cook. Jaidev knew his mother understood in her heart that he only meant well.

Kiran had done her best to raise Jaidev with all the education she could provide, and the boy had outperformed her expectations on every front. He was, in fact, a prodigy of a sort, and his goals and dreams were apparent to all - and more than that, he had the ability to execute, and to make his vision come true.

Sukhbir, by now, was just 3 months away from being released, and Kiran wondered how she could continue along with their life as Sukhbir returned. Jaidev still had an year of school left, and she couldn’t afford to become an outcast in Ranikhet like they had been in the past.

So she decided, that Sukhbir would return here, but would take on a new identity altogether. She still had to think of what the story would be, something that would be believable to all.

The next few weeks went by uneventfully, and Jaidev and his friends focused on tasks at school. Jaidev wrote short poetry for the Ranikhet Daily, and his poems garnered more responses as time went on, especially at the marketplace and the tea stalls. Because of him, a few young kids had also been inspired to pick up poetry.

He continued to meet Maggie, and she had just written her final exams - she’d completed her high school via correspondence, and was going to go back to England for University in a few months. Jaidev was going to miss her, and she’d been a true friend to him all along. Because of her, he’d learnt English and was quite fluent at it, much beyond what any of the local boys could speak.

As instructed by Kiran, Jaidev was to keep his focus on his final exams, and he was not allowed to conduct any of his “campaign-style” or “political influenced” activities. If he didn’t pass his final exams, all his life he would be considered an illiterate, no matter how intellectual he was. She gave him the examples of all great leaders of the world - Bapuji, Nehru, Netaji Bose, whomsoever it may be, they had all completed their education. And if Jai wanted to be a great leader, he had to do the same.

This idea resonated with Jaidev.

He focused all his attention on his final exams, even though, as the days went by, he became more and more excited about the prospect of meeting his father again.

“Jaidev, I have thought through it, we are going to tell everyone in the city that your father was a sailor at sea, and he was captured by pirates off the coast in the middle east. He had no contact

with India, and only found us when he went back to Delhi, and some old neighbours informed him about us.”

“I understand, ma. But what if somebody from the prison recognises him here?”
Kiran had thought through this, and the only plausible explanation was - there was just a resemblance.

“He may look like someone else, Jaidev, that’s what we’ll say. Just like how Dharmesh and Kunjlal look alike, and Arjun and Wasim look alike, any body who recognises your father, we’ll tell them that they’re mistaken.”

“Okay, ma. I can’t wait! Finally, we will see him again..”

“Yes, dear - in one month!”

Indeed, Jaidev couldn’t wait - and neither could Kiran. The days were passing by quickly, and Jaidev continued to study, and eagerly await. They were in their last two days of waiting, when they received a letter from the postman. It didn’t say from who it was.

Both Jaidev and Kiran opened the letter anxiously.

“Dear Kiran and my son, Jaidev,

I know you have been eagerly waiting for my return. I am currently in New Delhi, but I have decided that I will not be coming to meet you and live with you right now. I know, Jaidev, you have your final exams, and I do not wish to cause any disturbance in your life until you are done with your exams. I know that you will understand.

For the next three months, I need you to fully focus on your studies, and we shall meet once you are done with your exams. There are lots of things to do and to see ! I cannot wait to see you both, my dear family. We shall meet soon. Until then, take care, and focus on your exams.

Love you both.

Sukhbir”

They were both heartbroken. Jaidev very rarely had tears in his eyes, but he too numbed for a few moments. He was so excited to see his father but his father loved them both too much and he was willing to wait longer, to ensure no disturbance was caused in their life.

Kiran consoled Jaidev, although she was just as heartbroken as he was. “It’s alright, son, it’s only a matter of four months. Your father and I both want you to excel in your exams, so don’t lose sight of the task at hand. Let’s achieve this.”

That night, Jaidev couldn’t sleep, and he wondered why he had to endure such hardships in life - when all his friends appeared to have it easy. Nobody lived without their father, and very few had mothers who worked. None of his partners at the Samyukta Party had such a life.

All these thoughts raced through his mind - and he lay awake, thinking, and wondering where life was going to take him.

CHAPTER 17: MAGGIE LEAVES

Jaidev was in school the next day, as usual - but he was preoccupied in mind, and his friends could notice. “Jaidev, what’s bothering you?”, asked Farid.

“Yeah, something’s not right Jaidev. Is it Maggie?”

Jaidev remembered that Maggie was leaving as well, he'd almost forgotten it due to the news of his father - and that was another reason to be sombre about.

"Yes, she's leaving in a month.. I don't know if I'll ever get to see her again."

"Don't worry Jaidev, everything will be alright! You'll see her again, I'm sure", said Karan.

Jaidev nodded with half a heart - she was going all the way to England, and he didn't have enough means to get to Delhi, leave alone England.

Suddenly, one of their classmates, Jagat, a boy who was more aloof and mostly always out of school, ran in.

"Jaidev ! Netaji Bose in here.. in Ranikhet! He's at the market and he's asking about you and the Samyukta Party!"

The boys sprang up. "What?!"

Jagat couldn't be joking because he didn't know about their meeting with Netaji in Surajkund.

Jaidev, Farid and Karan looked at each other for a moment, and then they ran - the fastest that they could run, all the way to the market. As they grew closer to the market, they could sense the crowd increasing, that there was chatter among the locals, and just like it had been in Surajkund, the celebrity of Netaji was here too.

Jaidev and the boys had felt it when Bapuji had come, and here it was again. Unlike Bapuji, it seemed, Netaji liked to move unannounced, to keep everyone guessing.

The boys reached the market, and there he was, the man himself - Netaji Bose ! With his comrades, sitting at Nathu's restaurant, having a cup of tea. He saw Jaidev and stood up. Everybody in the crowd was perplexed, but they knew Jaidev was an exceptional boy, and were eager to know what brought Netaji to the town.

"Jaidev, Farid, Karan, comrades. It is good to see you."

"Netaji !", the boys gasped.

"I had heard so much about Ranikhet, I decided to visit and see it's beauty for myself."

"Yes Netaji, we'll show you all the good places!", Jaidev replied, excitedly.

"Oh, those I can see for myself. I've come for another reason - I'd like to talk to you boys. Why don't we come inside?"

And to the dismay of the crowd, Netaji and the boys went inside the restaurant, where prying ears could not listen to the conversation.

"I understand you boys have your final year exams coming up."

"Yes, sir."

"Good. I need you three to study very hard and excel in the exams. After that, I need you to come to Calcutta."

"Calcutta?"

"Yes. I'd like you to join our group of revolutionaries. You boys have shown heart and desire, and I have heard of your poetic and oratory skills, Jaidev. We need young men like you to join forces with us, so we can defeat the intruder and ensure our country is not divided up, like many so called leaders here would like to see."

The three boys were amazed.

“I am leaving here with you 20 rupees, which will be enough for your journey to Calcutta, and a few days stay there. You are to meet my close comrade, Satyajit Mukhopadhyay, once you get there. He will make further arrangements - here is the address.”

Netaji handed over the money and the address to Jaidev.

“If you decide not to take the trip, I shall understand. But in my heart, I will be expecting you 6 months from now in Calcutta. Wish you boys the best.”

And Netaji stepped out of the restaurant, to a great applause from the crowd. Kiran and Nathu, who were also present at the restaurant, wondered what Netaji told the three boys.

Netaji had come in a car, and he sat back in the vehicle a few minutes later, and drove away, another car tailing him as he drove out. He didn't stay for much longer after speaking to the three boys.

Kiran rushed into the restaurant, and she saw the three boys standing there, frozen, with money in hand and a piece of paper.

“What did he say?!”, she questioned.

“He wants us to come to Calcutta.”

“But you have exams.”

“After the exams. He wants us to go there after the exams.”

“And the money?”

“It's for our travel there.”

Nathu entered the restaurant, and Jaidev immediately pocketed the money.

“What's going on here guys?!”

Jaidev didn't want to tell anyone too much. “Netaji really likes my poetry!”

“What? He came all the way just to commend you on your poetry?”

“Yes - he heard about my victory at Woodford.”

“Tell me the truth. What is it that he wanted?”

“He wants us to go to Calcutta to work for him.”

“Work for Netaji Bose?! That is amazing!”

“Yes, it truly is.”

When Farid and Karan told their parents about working for Netaji Bose, they weren't too pleased. They didn't want their children to go down the path of a freedom fighter - they had heard of the tough trials and tribulations such men had to go through, and didn't wish the same for their children.

Understandably so, Farid and Karan were not allowed to go to Calcutta - no matter the money given by Netaji, and the prestige that would come, if they worked with the great man.

“You are going to go to Lucknow University after this, Farid, and you will study - not go join some bloody violent cause!”

“But we have to build the Samyukta Party!”

“There is no Samyukta Party - you boys had fun as kids, but you cannot do this all your life. Enough - I am not hearing any more of this!”

It was a similar story at Karan's house. “If you go to Calcutta, who is going to look after our shop? Do you expect me to manage the store until the day I die?”, exclaimed Karan's father, who owned the local grocery store.

Karan's mother was equally apprehensive - “You are not going to Calcutta. Your father and I have never been to Calcutta, how could you even think of going there?”

In reality, both Karan and Farid's parents knew that all of these activities the boys had done, had been planned and executed by Jaidev.

And so, both Karan and Farid were forbidden. Jaidev didn't have any such roadblocks at home. All Karan asked was for Jaidev to finish his 12th exams, to do well, and then meet his father, before he ventured into the world on his own.

If Netaji had come in person to invite Jaidev, then there must be a greater plan in mind.

Time seemed to breeze past. Jaidev would study every day, and time would fly as he would think about meeting his father, and then going to Calcutta. He wondered what Calcutta was like. He wondered what working with Netaji would be like, and all the things he could accomplish. It was an exciting time for him indeed.

And then, it came a time for Maggie to leave India for England. Jaidev had been meeting her more frequently as her time to leave came, and they used to discuss their dreams.

“I'd like to be like Bapuji”, Jaidev used to say.

And Maggie would smile - she didn't think it was all too outlandish for him to have such a dream. “I'm going to be like Bapuji as well, Jaidev. I'm going to be a lawyer.”

“Yes- you're going to be a very powerful, famous lawyer, Maggie.”

And they both looked forward to the future, their lives at the cusp of a major change.

Jaidev went to visit Maggie at her home the day before she left. It was an emotional time for him, as she was his best friend for so many years. She and her family had supported him in more ways than one. As he saw her for one last time, not knowing when life would have them meet again, tears rolled down his cheeks. And Maggie's as well.

Maggie left on a Saturday morning, and they promised each other they would write regularly and keep in touch.

Jaidev went back home feeling slightly empty, knowing that he didn't have the friend he could always call upon anymore - at least not in the city.

Jaidev's exams were fast approaching and a few days prior, he felt fully ready and prepared to write them. The exams were simpler than they had first seemed, he realised, and even if he did no more preparation for the entire week, he would pass them with flying colours.

That's exactly how he felt on the week he wrote the exams - each exam seemed simpler than the last, whether it was mathematics, logic or science. The results wouldn't be out for a few weeks, but he felt at ease once the exams were done - and had no stresses about what the results might be. Kiran was sure, as well, that Jaidev had done well on the exams.

Jaidev's first question after completing his exams was, "When and how are we going to meet father?"

Kiran had received another letter in Jaidev's absence, and Sukhbir had provided them an address in Lucknow where he was staying. Now that Jaidev's exams were over, they were free to go, and Sukhbir's coming to Ranikhet would raise a lot of questions - and it may be easier for them just to shift to a different city, as Jaidev was going to Calcutta anyways.

The journey to Lucknow seemed to be the longest journey of their lives, their carriage inching away slowly, and taking them to Surajkund, from where they would take the train.

CHAPTER 18: MEETING FATHER AGAIN

Compared to Ranikhet, Surajkund and other nearby towns that Jaidev had visited, Lucknow was a massive city. The only time he had been to such a city was when they'd travelled to Delhi for a week, during one of Jaidev's school holidays. He remembered being in awe of the size and scale of the roads, shops and markets, and the wide range of products and food available.

They reached Lucknow early in the morning. Sukhbir was to be at the platform, waiting for them - they wondered what he would look like, and he wondered the same. They had not seen each other for 3 years, when Kiran had last visited him at the prison.

Jaidev, now about 6 foot tall, and sturdily built like his father, searched across the platform. Kiran looked around as well.

Right by the administrative office of the station, they caught a glimpse of a man looking the other way - the same broad shoulders as Jaidev, and the same hair, the way it flew with the wind.

Jaidev knew it was his father. They walked in that direction, and before they could reach him, the man turned around. It was indeed Sukhbir.

They rushed to each other and fell into an embrace, having been united after so many years. The embrace lasted for a minute, or it could have been longer. Tears reached into their eyes, and Kiran cried, as if all those suppressed cries from the past years had finally got a chance to release themselves.

"My son!" , Sukhbir looked at Jaidev - "Look at how you've grown, tall and strong, just like me!"

Jaidev smiled. Sukhbir had lost some weight in the prison, but he was still robustly built. His moustache had streaks of grey and so did his hair, but he looked fit and healthy.

"We look alike, father."

Sukhbir laughed, and hugged his son once more. "We're supposed to, aren't we?"

It was a truly emotional reunion for them all. "Come, let us go home."

Sukhbir had rented a small one room apartment near Lucknow's city centre. He used to earn money as a carpenter, welder and stone breaker at the prison, and had saved it for exactly this time.

"So, you are telling me Netaji came to Ranikhet just to visit you?!"

“Yes!”

“That is truly amazing, Jaidev. And he gave you 20 rupees?”

“Yes, father. But my friends are not going to join me. So I will return most of the money to him, I only need 5 rupees for myself, to make it to Calcutta from Ranikhet.”

“That’s good, son. You are an honest man, just like I am. Netaji is a cult figure in the prisons as well, and stories of him are well known far and wide. He is tough man.”

Kiran looked at Sukhbir and Jaidev, and then she said, “Jaidev, just be sure, that whatever work you shall do with Netaji, it will not be easy.”

Sukhbir agreed. “But Jaidev, if Netaji has been asking for you, there must be something he has planned. I know he has been setting up the Forward Bloc movement across India, recruiting young, strong minded people such as yourselves.”

“Yes father, I have heard as well.”

“We are poor people, I mean, nobody is going to give us a nice job as an accountant or a administrator. But my only request is, when you get there, ask Netaji if he can support you to get a University education as well. There are many institutions in Calcutta, and if you get a degree, it will serve you in the long run.”

Kiran agreed.

“Okay father, I shall ask him.”

“But don’t disregard your duties towards Netaji for your education. Our country needs men like yourselves in these times.”

Jaidev agreed - he had a dream in mind, but he also had concerns for his father. “Father, what are you going to do now that you’re out?”

“I am going to find some work in Lucknow. I have made some friends in prison and we plan to do some work together, trading some goods between here and the other provinces. Kiran, I would like you to move here with me.”

Kiran thought for a moment. “Ranikhet has been good to us. But I can understand - we can’t go back there. The people in Ranikhet are good, but too many questions will be asked if we return with you.”

“Jaidev will be going to Calcutta next month. I will come and live with you here in August.”

Sukhbir smiled, and so did Jaidev and Kiran.

Almost in joy, Sukhbir said - “Well, then, let’s have some tea ! This is the thing I missed most in prison, next to you guys - to be able to have a cup of tea in peace. And it is all I’ve been doing since I’ve been out.”

The three laughed, enjoying a light moment.

Jaidev and Kiran returned to Ranikhet the following week, and immediately, Jaidev began to prepare to leave for Calcutta.

He met his friends Farid and Karan one last time, and they discussed all the fun times and plans they had made. But Jaidev understood they could not come with him.

“Don’t worry - I’ll make up for the three of us”, said Jaidev, confidently.

“Make sure you come back once you achieve it all.”, said Farid.

“Yes, don’t forget us.”

“I won’t.”

CHAPTER 19: ENTER CALCUTTA

Jaidev reached Calcutta in late July, when monsoon was at its peak. It was raining heavily in the evening when his train arrived, and he realised, thankfully, that he didn’t bring much belongings with him - except for a few sets of clothes.

There was no transportation to get to the city from Howrah Station that evening, and the rain only seemed to be getting worse. He entered the cloak room, which was already filled with people, and found himself some room to sit and wait, until the storm passed. He would try to meet with Satyajit Mukhopadhyay tomorrow. He had sent him a letter the week prior, informing of his arrival.

It rained all night, but there was some respite in the morning. The first thing Jaidev did, was he went into the market near the station and bought himself an umbrella. He’d heard of Calcutta having trams, but he couldn’t find one near the train station - some of the locals told him that he could get one from a few kilometres away.

He asked for the best way to reach Shyambazar, the address given to him by Netaji, and the locals told him that he could simply walk, as it was only 5 or 6 kilometres from the station. Jaidev asked for the directions and then walked along the route.

Calcutta was a major hub of India in 1936, and he could sense that it was much bigger than Delhi, in terms of scale and size. Indeed, it was - being close to the Bay of Bengal, it was a major trade hub, and for over a hundred years, it was the centre of British Administration of India, along with being the capital of the country. It was also from where the East India Company operated.

Jaidev walked through the city streets, experiencing a few showers along the way, but he was pleased he’d bought himself an umbrella. It was a good investment.

Soon enough, he found a board which said “Shyambazar”, with an arrow points towards the East direction. Jaidev looked at the address given to him by Netaji, the same chit that was given by Netaji himself -

Apartment 20, Third floor, Old Regent Building, Shyambazar

Jaidev followed the board and then asked a local tea seller where the Old Regent Building was. The tea seller nonchalantly raised his arm and pointed down the road.

“This way? On this road itself?”, Jaidev asked.

“Yes yes.”

“Thank you.”

And Jaidev continued along. The road was lined up with buildings on each side, and it appeared to have been in much better condition maybe 30 or 40 years ago. Most of the buildings looked a little old and dilapidated, but there was activity around nevertheless. It was a place one could get lost in a crowd.

A few metres away, he saw a board at the doorway of an old, brick coloured building, that had been washed off its colour due to many seasons of Calcutta rain - Jaidev could tell by now that

the rain here was a major part of the city, with everyone walking around carrying their own umbrellas.

Old Regent Building

He walked through the doorway, and the interiors were of an old, victorian style - just a staircase that led up to the floors, with doors on either side, closed and inaccessible to somebody not invited. He walked up the stairs, his excitement increasing as he took each step. He was soon standing in front of Apartment 20. There was an iron door with a netting, and a wooden door behind that. He knocked, and he heard some movement from inside. A chair or perhaps a table moved.

The wooden door opened, and a young man, about 30-35 years old, was standing behind the iron door.

“Yes?”

“I am Jaidev Singh. Netaji has given me this address.”

The man’s eyebrows raised. “Oh yes, yes. Ofcourse.”

He immediately unlocked the iron door, the heavy clank of metal loud and telling of the strength of the door and it’s lock. “Please come in.”

Jaidev slowly walked in. Apartment 20 looked to be an office of some kind, with working desks and chairs, and papers and pamphlets strewn around.

“I hope it wasn’t difficult finding this place. I am Satyajit Mukhopadhyay. You may call me Satya.”, and he extended his arm for a handshake.

Jaidev shook his hand. “I am Jaidev Singh”.

“Yes, yes, the famous poet. Netaji has told me about you.”

Satyajit was a stocky man, not very tall, but not unfit. He looked attentive and observing, and studied Jaidev for a moment.

“Good that you bought an umbrella.”

“Yes, it’s the first thing I did.”

“Good, good. You’re going to need it here.”

Jaidev nodded. There was a couch in one corner of the room, and they sat down.

“So, this is where we’ll work and live. We’ve converted the living room into our office, and there are two bedrooms here. I sleep in this one, and you may sleep in the other”, he said, pointing towards a room in a corner of the hall.

“Two of our comrades, Bandho and Deshu, also work with us, and they occasionally come to the office here - however, they work more from the outside. You will be working with us.”

“It sounds great. What’ll I have to do?”

Satya laughed a little. “Relax, we’ll share the details later. Why don’t you get some rest first - you’ve had a long journey.”

Jaidev agreed. Satya then came up to Jaidev, and handed him a letter. “This is from Netaji for you.” Jaidev was pleased to see something for him from Netaji, and it mellowed down the fact that Netaji wasn’t here himself. He had been wondering all throughout his journey if Netaji would

be there when he first reached Old Regent Building, but he clearly understood that Netaji was more of an enigma.

Jaidev took the letter and went to his room.

His room was small and utilitarian. There was a single bed in one corner of the room, a mirror and a small cabinet to keep his belongings. It appeared the room had been tidied up before his arrival, ostensibly by Satya. There was a clean bed sheet on the bed, and a fresh blanket available. Jaidev was tired indeed, having spent three days travelling to Calcutta from Ranikhet, and then having spent the night on the hard floor of the cloak room at the Howrah Station. Satya could be heard outside doing some work, and Jaidev couldn't wait to get started on his tasks. But he first opened the letter.

"Dear Jaidev,

I am glad you have made it to Calcutta. A difficult, but rewarding journey awaits you ahead. You are to work with Satyajit and our comrades for the next few months.

I am travelling, working on our cause of eradicating the British from our Motherland. I want you to be focused on achieving the same task. Work hard, and success will be ours.

*Yours truly,
Subhas Chandra Bose"*

Jaidev held the letter in his hand for a few moments, and after freshening up, decided to get some sleep.

He woke up in the late afternoon, and as he exited his room, he saw Satya sitting on a work desk, writing something.

"Hello there -welcome back. Hope you got some good rest."

"Yes, thank you. I am refreshed."

"Lovely. Let's go and meet Bandho and Deshu. We can discuss your assignments and responsibilities once there."

"Yes, that sounds good."

They walked down the clustered Shyambazar lanes, with shops and offices all around them. Jaidev, although new to the city and such hustle and bustle, felt in place and assured of himself. Whenever he felt a little low on confidence, he remembered how Bapuji and Netaji had both praised him, and all of his trials and tribulations to get here.

Satya led the way, and they reached a small cafe about a kilometre from Old Regent Building. "Babu Da's Restaurant", it said. It was a medium sized establishment, with about 15 tables, and seating for over 50 people. A good place to have a conversation lost among people. Satya looked around, and his eyes fixed on two men, about the same age and build as Satya, seated in the corner of the restaurant. Satya nodded at them, and they walked over to the table, sitting down just as they got there.

"Hello again. This is Jaidev Singh."

Jaidev shook the two men's hands. "I am Deshu", the first man, moustached and hair slicked, said. The second man, clean shaven and spectacled, said, "And I am Bandho. Welcome to Calcutta."

The four men exchanged greetings, and Satya gestured to the waiter to bring them two cups of tea. Bandho and Deshu were halfway through theirs.

“So, what’s the news from Calcutta University?”

“The union isn’t allowing us to hold a rally. Surely the higher ups having them under control.”

“Looks like we’ll have to do this ourselves then - in guerrilla fashion.”

“Yes. So Jaidev, let’s go through some of the work that we do, and what you’ll be doing with us.”

Jaidev was listening in, intently.

“Our goal is simple - to eradicate our country of the British. Our country has been under slavery for almost 200 years now, simply because of the greed of a few people, like kings and royals, and landowners and businessmen. But the poor man pays for it all. And Bapuji’s ways have not worked - he has been promoting non-violence for the past 20 years, but it only makes the Britishers happier - since they don’t have to deal with violence, they just pass some law here and there, and everything continues as always.”

“Yes, like the Salt March. Remember all the news and hype around it? Well, what happened? Nothing! Bapu boiled some salt from the sea and ate it himself, but the taxes continued. In fact, the taxes have increased since then!”

Jaidev remembered the Salt March, and he remembered all the media coverage around it.

“Jaidev, Netaji told us that you ran some rallies around Hindu-Muslim unity - tell us more about it.”

“They weren’t really rallies, but yes, that’s the cause that got me most interested. We never saw any difference between Hindus and Muslims until some mobs started coming to our towns, claiming that one religion was better than the other, that they had been wronged by the other religion and so on. One of my closest friends is a Muslim. We never saw any difference between us.”

The three comrades agreed. “This is what the British and the Indian ruling class have been trying to do for many decades now - they call this the Divide and Rule policy. Make the Indians fight amongst themselves, and they won’t have any power to fight the British.”

“That makes sense”, said Jaidev.

“It totally does. But Netaji doesn’t believe in religion being a differentiating factor - I think that’s why he reached out to you. In our party, we have Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsis - and our only goal is to drive out the intruders, the British”, added Bandho.

“Have you heard of the riots happening around Sindh lately? Where Hindus and Muslims have been incited to fight each other, and what happens at the end of the bloodshed? The British come and take over the properties, and then lease them out, to the very people who fought for them - calling it a sort of ‘protection guarantee’! It is ridiculous.”, said Satya.

Everything was making great sense to Jaidev. He was glad he had come to Calcutta, and he would work as hard as he could towards the cause.

“So where is Netaji right now?”

“He is in Europe, trying to gain support for our cause with the Germans and Italians. A World War is brewing and if we can weaken the British in Europe, it may force them out of here.”, said Deshu.

“Well, that’s in Europe - we have a lot of issues to solve here in India. We need to raise awareness among the people, to get people to raise their voices ! For too long, everyone in India has been sleeping along, letting the British and the rich loot them.”, said Bandho.

“Jaidev, have you ever been in a fist fight?”

Jaidev was slightly taken aback by the impromptu question, but he nodded. “Yes, I have.”

“Well, you look like you could handle one or two on your own. Listen - this life is not easy. Now I’m not saying that we get into fistfights everyday - but we need to be prepared. That’s why, all of us in the Forward Bloc, we practice wrestling and judo, the martial arts of the Japanese. You must practice with us.”

“I surely will. I know a little myself.”

CHAPTER 20: MARTIAL ARTS AGAIN

Jaidev and Satya woke up up early next morning, around the crack of dawn. Satya proceeded to make some tea, and offered some to Jaidev. “You can make it tomorrow.”

They sat in silence for a few moments, enjoying their tea and the calm of an early morning in Calcutta.

“Today, we shall go wrestling”, Satya said.

The practice room, as they called it, was in the basement of an old warehouse near the Calcutta docks. It was around 8 AM, and Satya and Jaidev were the first ones in. “The rest should be here in about 30 minutes. We’ll do a few rounds till then.”

And so, they proceeded to tangle. Satya was surprised how skilful Jai was - he hadn’t expected it. But Jai had been training with Shivraj for years, and regularly practiced.

“You’ve got power, Jai, but let me show you what a master does.”

And Satya lunged forward, attempting to takedown Jai - but Jai stepped slightly to the side and dropped him instead. This time, it was a hard drop.

“I’ll get you, Jai, I’ll get you”, he said.

They stood up again, and tangled their shoulders together. Satya tried to flip him over in quick fashion, but Jaidev locked his foot behind Satya’s, a move he had learnt just a moment ago. Satya tried to break out, but Jaidev was the physically stronger of the two - and in one swift motion, he picked Satya off his waist, and dropped him over his shoulders.

Just then, six other men, including Deshu and Bandho, just walked into the room.

“Well, I didn’t know Jaidev could wrestle.”, said Deshu.

“Surely Netaji just doesn’t pick anyone off the streets”, replied another one of the men, who was slightly older, and more powerfully built than either Satya, Deshu or Bandho.

The other three men were just as physically imposing, burly and moustached, wearing traditional dhoti and kurta, their shoulders and arms bulging off the clothes.

“So this is Jaidev, the new recruit”, one of them said. “I am Vishnu, this is Amir and that is Aadi. We work with Netaji’s covert division. We’re going to practice wrestling and judo with you”.

Satya shrugged, he was up by now. "That was the only time he got me guys. He's still a rookie - he's got a lot to learn."

"Not if he dropped you like that", muttered Deshu.

The men wrestled and practiced some judo for the next few hours, and it was a strenuous, non-stop activity, thought Jaidev. Every time anyone wanted to take a break, one of the men would stop them and bring them back on the mat.

After wrestling practice, the crew sat down for a breather of a few minutes, with nobody saying much. And then Vishnu looked at Satya, asking, "I hope we are on schedule for the 20th."

Satya nodded. Jaidev still hadn't been told of the full plan that was to be executed 10 days from now, but he was sure he would be intimidated soon.

They left the practice room and went back to Old Regent Building, Deshu and Bandho coming with them. They all freshened up at the apartment, and then sat down to discuss some plans.

From one of the cupboards, Satya brought out about 500 printed pamphlets, each saying,

"Down with the intruders! Show your support at the Marine Club, Calcutta, on the 20th of August, starting at 10 AM onwards."

Each of the pamphlets had a photograph of Netaji Bose, neatly printed in the centre.

"Here, everyone, we need to gather enough interest and awareness for our protest on the 20th. Deshu and Bandhu, you guys take Park Street and the surroundings, while we will take Calcutta University and its neighbourhoods. Remember, don't waste any pamphlets - give them only to those who look like they'll come."

Satya then turned to Jai.

"While we conduct the rally, Vishnu and Amir are going to be entering the docks to conduct some business. We need to make sure that we have full attention of the area by 1 PM sharp - that's when the dock shifts for lunch and only minimal workers are inside."

"I see. What are they doing inside the docks?"

"You'll find out. Meanwhile, lets work on getting as many people as possible."

Over the next few days, Satya showed Jaidev around Calcutta - he showed him the areas of the elite, and the areas of the poor. Wherever they went, they carried pamphlets with Netaji's picture on them, and handed them to whoever was listening.

"We need to stop all support to the intruders, in whatever way possible !"

And yet, no matter what they did, it didn't seem to have much effect. People would listen from one ear and let it out the other - everyone had too many problems of their own to be solving things for the country.

But they continued on the efforts.

Jaidev was also tasked with coming up with poetry and small plays that could be performed at cultural and civil gatherings, to highlight Netaji's movement for freedom. Arts were an indirect approach to spreading the cause.

At a small cafe of the elite in central Calcutta, Jai and Satya were having a cup of tea and observing the surroundings and people, when they overheard a small group of men and women discussing about religious affairs.

“I’ve lived in North Calcutta all my life. But lately, we’ve got these population officials coming, verifying the number of Hindus and Muslims living in the area. I mean, our house isn’t affected, but they sometimes forcibly move people out of areas because of their religion.”

“I remember when Hindus and Muslims lived in harmony. I mean, it was 50 or 60 years ago, but it never matter what religion one was, until lately.”

“It could go back to being that way, if we raise our voices”, Jaidev shot in.

The group looked at him for a moment, and one of the men replied, “Well, you’re quite an idealist aren’t you?”

“Not really. I’m from Ranikhet and we accept people from all religions, working, living and progressing in harmony. I’m not sure why all the disputes politically.”

The group was half interested in engaging with Jai and Satya, but the same old man added. “Politics and real life are very different, young man.”

“And thats what I’m saying, they shouldn’t be.”

The conversation continued, and as they were leaving, the old man shook hands with Jai and Satya - He was impressed by the two young men’s confidence to discuss pressing matters - “You can find me on 25 Chowringhee Street, if you ever would like to discuss further. My name is Haider Khan.”

“Are you the Haider Khan of Kingston tea?”

“The very one.”

Kingston tea was the biggest seller of tea in Bengal, and they owned several plantations all across the state and even in Assam.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, sir.”

“Thank you”, said Jaidev. “We shall certainly meet.”

CHAPTER 20: RECRUITMENT

Calcutta University was a major centre of arts, culture and political activity in the 1930s. It was one of the premier institutes of India, and some of the most renowned thinkers and scholars studied and lectured there. It was a huge campus, and thousands of people crossed the area everyday.

Jaidev and Satya were to hand over pamphlets for a protest the Forward Bloc was planning, and they had to ensure they could get enough awareness about the event before hand.

Jaidev and Satya spoke to at least a 100 people everyday, persuading people to come to the event.

“How do you think we should get rid of the British from our country?”, was one of the first questions they asked.

Most people were disinterested, they had their own tasks to attend to, but about 1 in 10 people would show some genuine response.

“They should be beaten out, like Netaji and Lala Lajpat said!”

Anyone who showed such an emotion towards the cause, was given a pamphlet. Both Jaidev and Satya had to be careful that they didn't draw too much attention either, for they didn't want to be arrested before the protest itself.

The big day soon arrived. The four comrades and drawn up around 20 more followers, and they stood right outside Marine Club, Calcutta, and began raising pickets and shouting slogans. The area was just next to the Calcutta docks, and there were several important administrative buildings around them.

“Down with the invaders!”

“No more imperialism!”

“Britishers, go back!”

Jaidev, Satya, Deshu, Bandho and about 20 others continued to raise slogans. Some passerby stopped and joined them, and their energy was infectious to the people around. Soon enough, there were about 50 people who had joined them, and it had started to affect traffic around the area.

From the road outside the Marine Club, the entry to the docks could be seen, and the police station was a mere 500 meters away. It was only a matter of time before the police would come to the area force them all to disperse.

The crowd was soon growing.

Jaidev had been tasked with reciting a poem to this crowd, to keep them engaged and interested, and he obliged.

*The foreigner, he takes our land
He eats our food
He steals our gold
He enters our home
He disrupts our sleep
He takes our beds
He keeps us weak*

*He divides us deep
He loots the meek
He says we are slaves
And this is his street*

Now no more shall we be silenced!

*Our voices will be heard
Those who stole our land
Our blood you've stirred
This is a beginning
No more is there ease
For everything you steal
We'll fight till we breathe !*

The crowd broke into a huge roar. More people began to crowd around the area, and there were now about a 100 in gathering. In this distance, Jaidev saw Vishnu and his crew make a quiet walk into the crowd, but soon disappeared.

As if on cue, the police soon arrived. They came with sticks and batons, and started ordering the crowd to disperse.

Satya and Deshu resisted, shouting, "This is what they want! We shall not leave! The Britishers must leave our country!", and looking at them, Jaidev followed suit. A few more constables arrived.

"We will not leave!", they kept screaming, and the crowd got a little more energised, and a few in the crowd began pushing the constables away.

Eventually, however, a few dozen constables were on location, and Satya gestured to Jaidev and the crew quietly - "Our job is done - it's time to leave."

And they pushed through the crowd, and shoved their way out, and began to make a quick run. The area around the Calcutta docks was filled with small roads and bylanes, and the four young men eventually lost the trail.

They ran for a few kilometres, and within two hours, made it back to Old Regent Building, all four of them, safe and sound.

"We succeeded, boys!", exclaimed Satya.

Jaidev still wasn't sure of what this protest had duly accomplished, but indeed, they had drawn a crowd and had done their bit for the revolution. And yet, there was a whole lot more to the story.

The next day, they went to the practice room, as it was customary, at 8 in the morning. Vishnu and his crew were already there, waiting for them. They had with them a few sacks and bags.

"Congratulations boys! We succeeded!"

Satya gave Vishnu and Amir a tight hug. "We did, indeed."

Vishnu reached into one of the sacks and brought out a pistol. "Look at this - British made, highly accurate."

So this was the plan, Jaidev thought.

And then Amir reached into another sack, and brought out some paper money and jewellery.

"This is to help us buy some judges and policemen if we ever need to."

"Oh, we shall need to, surely."

The small crew of eight spent the day celebrating. They had succeeded in looting a steamer that had brought in goods for the British administrators and policemen.

Eventually, this would lead to more information that they could use.

BUILDING THE NETWORK

The next few weeks were highly volatile. British authorities were aware that some local boys had organised a decoy rally and had looted weapons from the dock near Kidderpore, and were on the lookout.

“You see, the main difference between the British and us is that the British have the best weapons - why do you think our krantikaris regularly fail ? Because the Britisher comes armed with rifles and pistols and bombs, and all we have are laths and swords.”, Vishnu said, at one of their wrestling meets.

“If we had as many people and guns, we could shove them out within an year, for sure”, added Jai.

“Yes, but look at how difficult it is to find weapons - we had to conduct that whole fake rally to get what, 20 pistols?”

“The Britisher will come with 20 thousand pistols if we cause too much noise.”

“Well, before we can get 20 thousand pistols, we need 20 thousand men”, said Jai.

“Yeah, that’s another challenge - most of the youth today is happily roaming about, looking for a job, marriage and a stable life. Who wants to get caught up in revolutions and agitations and fights and jail time?”

The boys nodded. It was difficult to get people to join a proactive revolt - most people were happy in being attendance at a crowd or a rally, and even give some donation - but not many wanted to be hands at work.

“You know, I’ve been thinking”, Jai said.

“Our approach is generally to directly enlist people to work with us, which never works. I mean, unless its Netaji approaching people directly, this approach isn’t very successful.”

“True, most people don’t show up when it’s time to.”

“We must enlist them indirectly.”

“How?”

“Samyukta Wrestling Club”, said Jai, coolly.

The rest of the boys paused for a moment, looked at each other.

Then Vishnu said, “You mean enlist them to train with us so we can find worthy comrades?”

“This could work”, Satya added.

“We’ll run the club from here itself. We have the location, we just need to bring the people. And by training with them, we can find out who’s really worthy and able.”

The crew agreed. Samyukta Wrestling Club was opened in late 1936, and they had their first trainees within a week of opening. Two young men from Awadh, Hari and Madan, came in for a session - they weren’t very skilful, but they showed heart.

Jai and the boys didn’t expect them to return, but they did the next day.

And soon enough, Samyukta Wrestling Club got itself established, with over 20 members within the first two months of operations. The club members came from all sections and areas of society, and the fee was 1 rupee per month for those who could afford it, but free for those who couldn’t.

Vishnu, Satya, Jai, Aamir, they had begun identifying those within the trainees as to who would be useful in their cause for independence, and began enlisting recruits and assigning them tasks, such as reconnaissance, enlisting more members, and sometimes, causing disruption activities, such as blocking goods from being delivered to British administrative offices, breaking down communication lines and ransacking British Raj vehicles.

CHAPTER 21: BOMBAY GLIMPSE

Far away, in Bombay, there was a deeper plot brewing, due to a power struggle between stalwarts of Indian politics. It was 1936, and the first major provincial elections were to be held across India the following year - the 1935 Government of India act had been put into effect, and local leaders now had a way to gain power, albeit limited as the British still ruled India.

Netaji Bose had returned to India from Europe in early 1936, but he was swiftly arrested upon his arrival, and put in a prison - first in Bombay, then Poona, and finally in Darjeeling. His arrest was widely resented across India, but he would not be released for another year.

With the upcoming elections, every political leader wanted to grow their clout, and the only two commonalities most Indians had at the time were poverty, and religion. Most politicians tried to keep their followers as poor and as devout as possible.

Two local Bombay leaders, Virendra Sahu and Iqbal Khan, had clashed over who got to control the hashish and illicit liquor in their localities - both of them ran rackets not too far away from each other, one who lived in Mahim and another in Dadar, which were about 5 kilometres away.

Their groups had clashed late in the night when Sahu's men tried to smuggle some liquor into the town area, and four men had been killed, two from each side. Somehow, the administrators of higher power, instead of highlighting how both groups were actually gangs, made most use of this event, and termed it a religious fight. It looked better to be termed a battle over religion, than to mention the truth that illicit drugs and liquor were being sold in the city.

"Religious groups clash late in the night!"

"Hindus and Muslims at war again!"

These were the headlines that read in the newspaper the next day, and there was very little mention of how illicit liquor was actually being smuggled into the city. Local politicians now had a chance to leap into action - the Hindu politician began accumulating support via the use of his own Gods, and the Muslim politician did the same.

If the basis of voting could be religion, nobody would ask for development and advancement of life - as long as one's Gods were pleased, everything else could pass.

The midnight clash between the two gangs had ripples far and wide, and suddenly, religion had become even more important in the first provincial elections to be held in India. Already, Hindus and Muslims lived in separate buildings in most places - now they would vote for different people as well.

No single leader could ever become so strong that they would have everyone's support, and this idea suited the British.

CHAPTER 22: NEW POLITICAL PARTY

*If you haven't eaten for days,
And if you've felt the hunger within,
Do you ask a piece of fruit
If it is Hindu or Muslim ?*

*If you listen to a sangeet
Or if you listen to a ghazal
Do you not feel emotion*

Or do you feel troubled ?

*That the lines that you heard
Were written by a Hindu
But sang by a Muslim
Performed by a Parsi
And repeated by a Christian*

*Your local leader
He will try to crack your skull
And fill it with lies
Until you are dumb*

*The food that we eat
The air that we breathe
The dreams that we see
They have no religion
For you and for me*

*You've come to enjoy tonight
But somewhere goes a fight
A Hindu and a Muslim
They both come with might*

*They came with sticks
And they came with stones
And then they fought each other
They broke their own homes*

*I hope you will remember
These words that I've said
We shall go back to Jatra
But don't lose your heads !*

Jaidev had read the news about the clash in Bombay between Hindus and Muslims, and published the above lines at the Calcutta Herald, convincing the editor via sheer will, waiting outside his office until he agreed.

"We need to be aggressive with the movement, guys. Netaji may not be here but he cannot lose sight of our goals.", Satya said, as the crew worked at the office. "I think we're being to complacent, even though the enemy is at our doorstep."

"It seems the British and some of our leaders are hell bent on empowering the divide and rule policy. Look at the government in Bengal - Hindu and Muslim parties, in coalition power, but still mutually divided", said Jaidev, as he read the paper and Satya and Deshu listened, all three in the apartment working on a few tasks.

"This is how the elite will keep everyone weak. I'm telling you, we're going to see a lot more of this.", said Satya.

"Well, we should do something about it."

"What, like a useless rally holding placards about unity?"

"No, but we need to increase awareness. Hindus and Muslims didn't have too many differences 20 years ago - it seems as time goes on, the politicians are finding ways to increase suspicion between the two religions."

“We’ll think of something to do. Come on, we have to draft these legal papers and file a case against the British officers by tomorrow.”

And they got back to work.

Calcutta was a place of rich culture, and Jaidev, Satya, Deshu and Bandho used to spend several nights a week visiting local theatres and plays, garnering support for their cause and also to find out what activities had been going on amongst the city folk.

That night, as they watched an old Bengali play, also known as “Jatra”. The Samyukta members held a short play for the crowd at one of the Jatra nights. Their play was titled “1905-When Bengal was Divided”.

It was true, that Bengal was indeed divided along religious lines in 1905 - but the memory of the partition was not a pleasant one for many. It had been 40 years since, but many among the streets of Calcutta remembered the riots, loss and bloodshed that had ensued.

So the Samyukta members, performing a play about 1905 was emotional for many. All of the actors were students of the wrestling centre, Jai, Satya and Amir included.

“The last time this state was divided we lost thousands of our Hindu and Muslim brothers and sisters”, spoke Satya, on stage.

“This time they are dividing the country, sir.”, said Amir, acting as a police officer.

“What is the price for dividing the country then ? A million lives?”, said Samar.

The crowd watched intently. The play struck a chord. Several of the audience members approached the Samyukta Party crew after the play and many were given invitations to come to party headquarters, which was the wrestling centre.

The next morning, the crew was up early. Deshu and Bandho had slept at the apartment itself, taking one of the couches each.

“So you really want to go to the slums and push for religious unity?”, asked Satya.

“Yes. Already there are groups pushing for division - we should do the opposite.”

“You do know that this will invite the wrath of Hindu and Muslim leaders both? They won’t support us if they find us eating into their vote banks.”

“Well, what do we do of their support? Make halwa? If political leaders can use religion as a basis of gaining Followership, we can do the opposite - we can make development our cause. That’s what Netaji would want!”

The boys agreed. Netaji had never once mentioned religion as a basis for division - and while it was difficult to get a hold of him, as he was in Europe, they decided to take matters in their own hands. They got Vishnu and his crew onboard as well, and they believed in religious unity as well - after all, two of their members were Muslims who regularly said - “If we get our hands on any of these so called fake Muslim leaders, we’ll twist their necks ourselves!”

And so it was decided - they would start rallying in the most populated of slums and localities, pushing for religious unity, instead of division.

This was what Jaidev had tried to do as a young teenager, when he created the Samyukta Party. This time, they officially registered the name - the *Samyukta Party*.

They began their rallies from the densely populated Kidderpore, Burra Bazar and Howrah areas. They would walk through the streets, carrying placards highlighting their party symbol, and their cause -

“Unity is strength.”

It was 1937, and religious divisions were growing, but there were many who still didn't know what to believe in. Were Hindus really as oppressive as the local Muslim leader said ? Or were Muslims really as back-stabbing as a Hindu leader would have you believe ?

“Religion is no basis for war!”

And the four young men rallied for hours together, walking around narrow lanes, shops and markets. Sometimes, they would be joined by Vishnu and his crew, and they would rally with them.

Considering that all these young men were well built, trained in martial arts, and not afraid to fight, most people, even the local *gundas*, didn't raise issue with them.

And when someone did, they were swiftly answered, either by way of a throw down, or a chokehold until the latter gave up. The immediate and strong retaliation that Jaidev, Satya or Vishnu would give to anyone who brought upon why “Hindus and Muslims must fight”, or why one religion was better than the other, soon started spreading around the city.

The *Samyukta Party* was soon known as a forward thinking, progressive party, and worked mostly around the poor and congested areas of Calcutta. They rallied for peace, unity and acceptance of all cast and creeds - instead of division. It soon grew from just 8 members at the time of inception, to over 1000 within 3 months. And the number grew everyday.

There were going to be elections in Calcutta in January 1937, and the Samyukta Party would take part - they positioned themselves as an extension of Netaji's thoughts and beliefs, but away from the Indian National Congress, which they believed had too many supporters of the British, and the Muslim League, which was born out of religion and in direct opposition to the Samyukta Party.

“We are going to win a seat in this election”, Jaidev told Satya, one evening.

“No matter what we do, we have to win a seat.”

CHAPTER 23: FIGHTING THE ELECTIONS

The provincial elections of 1937 were the first elections to be held in India giving power to the people of each province. However, voting rights were limited - the minimum age to vote was 25, and one had to be educated. The most striking feature was, however, that voting categories were divided amongst religions. Hindus could vote for the “General Category”, Muslims could vote under the “Muslim Category” and Christians had their own category. Zamindars and some of the commerce sections like the Port of Calcutta had their own category as well. So even if one was elected, they would still only have a small portion of electorate power.

Elected officials would be known as Members of Legislative Assembly, and while the powers would still largely be held with the British, it would allow Jaidev and the Samyukta Party to start having a say in some of the matters pertaining to the people, officially - instead of always taking to the streets.

Netaji was still in prison, and his brother, Sarat Chandra Bose, was appointed as a key leader for the Bengal Province by the Indian National Congress. The Khansaab led Muslim League was also contesting the elections, and Fazlul Haq's Krishak Sramik Party was a third major player.

The Muslim Category had over 115 seats, while the General category had 78. It was clear that a government leading Bengal would be formed by Muslims. Yet, Jaidev had decided that if he and his comrades could win just 5 seats out of the total lot, they could make a huge difference.

The crew had wrote to Netaji for guidance, stating their beliefs as shared with Netaji, but not of that with the Congress, whom they held responsible for the religious divide, as much as the Muslim League or any other regional party was.

“Dear Netaji,

We hope you are doing fine in Darjeeling, and that your health is keeping up. We have been diligently working towards raising awareness of our cause, and as instructed by you, we have left no stone unturned in bringing together Hindus and Muslims, as much as possible.

Now, comes a time of true trial and tribulation, and the elections are to be held in just 2 months here in Bengal. We would like to contest the elections - Vishnu, Satya, Jaidev, Amir and Aadil - the five of us would contest in the General and Muslim categories respectively, but not under the Congress party. We shall never get a ticket under a major party like the INC. Hence, we would like to contest under our self formed Samyukta Party.

We seek your blessings to contest the elections.

Your Loyal Comrades”

Within two weeks of sending the letter, they received a reply from Netaji, addressed to his crew at Old Regent Building.

“Dear Comrades

You have my blessings. Go and win the election!”

*Yours truly,
Subhas”*

Netaji’s blessing was all the needed.

The first thing Jaidev did, was to create a fake birth certificate which stated his age was 26, and that he was born in 1911, instead of 1918, his actual birth year. Satya did the same, as they both were 21 and 22 at the time. The rest of the boys were old enough to run for elections.

They filed their nominations and began campaigning in their respective constituencies.

Jaidev took Howrah (General), Satya took Kidderpore (General), Vishnu took Tollygunge, Amir had Hedua and Aadil had Barrackpore.

The five young men had decided to go all in - to win the election at any cost, but not lose their values of non-religious alignment.

They decided to campaign together, wherever they went. Slogans of “Samyukta Party”, with taglines such as “All Religions are One”, “Hindus and Muslims are alike”, “Better to be friends than enemies”, were chanted throughout the city.

The five men were running for election, but over the past many months they had built a large following around the city, whenever they stepped in to support a poor man’s cause, or fought

oppressive gangs dominating slums and low income areas. Wherever they went, they ensured that they had at least 50 people following them.

Of course, getting elected was not going to be easy. The only citizens who had a right to vote were those who had a university education, and those who either owned land, or were directly related to those working in the Administrative services. This largely put most Indians off the voters' list - so while the poor would follow and support them, they had to garner enough support from the upper class and elite, most of whom had their own agendas in deciding who to vote for.

Their ideology, of Hindu and Muslim unity, sounded very good and idealistic, but in real world terms it was rather impractical.

And so they decided to have radical approaches.

They listed down all the voters from each of their constituencies, and realised that most of them either owned factories, mills, farms, or worked in administrative services. With the help of their party followers, they decided to picket and hoard, and in many ways, extort their targets to vote for them, come election day.

For example, Bikash Sengupta was the owner of a paper mill just outside Calcutta, and his family had been close to the British elite for over a century - they contributed to multiple "funds" that the British held, and enjoyed close support from them. They also employed over 5000 eligible voters across their companies.

Every day, Bikash would leave home from Alipore in his car, with another car holding two body guards in tow. Jaidev, Vishnu and Aadil punctured their car tyres with the help of nails on the road and appeared as masked men, and filled their vehicles with pamphlets telling them to vote for "Samyukta Party".

Similarly, Ashok Chatterjee was the owner of a radio broadcast service, and he used to frequent popular Calcutta restaurants on a daily basis. Satya and a few of their comrades followed him several times, and almost "ordered" him and all his employees to vote for "Samyukta Party".

The first few times they did so, Ashok didn't have a response, and he let it pass. But upon the fourth time, he decided enough was enough, and he put out a broadcast on his radio station, about the "hooligan-like" activities of the Samyukta Party, and how everyone should not vote for such a party at all.

While Ashok's motive was simply to denounce the Samyukta Party completely, what it did instead was it aroused a huge interest in the party, especially the youth - they found in the Samyukta Party a group of "guerrillas" and "renegades", who were willing to go an extra mile - plus, they even promoted Hindu-Muslim unity - something most people agreed with, but nobody spoke for politically.

Suddenly, the Samyukta Party, for all its outlaw tactics, had become popular across the city - all that Jaidev and his comrades had wanted to do was to have the elite vote for them - instead, they were now one of the most talked about names across Calcutta and beyond.

The police soon showed up at Old Regent Park, and arrested Jaidev, Satya and Deshu, who were present there at the time.

ARRESTED FOR PARTY PROMOTION

The police in Calcutta had been instructed to keep the Samyukta Party members off the streets until elections were over, and the ruling elite was tired of hearing about them.

Yet, the public, especially the poor, had found in the Samyukta Party a new group that breathed life into their hopes of a free future, and a free country. The Congress, Muslim League, Bapu and other leaders and parties had long been around and had not done anything, besides dividing the country further, especially along religious lines.

The Samyukta Party was already known amongst the poor of the city, and now that its leaders were arrested, the entire city knew of them.

On the first night of their arrest, Jaidev, Satya and Deshu were beaten with canes and kept standing with their arms over their heads, wrists locked in chains for over eight hours. Nobody raised their voice against the British empire and its few trusted people - and these young men were going to learn the hard way.

In Jaidev's mind, he was living the life of a true freedom fighter, and prison and capital punishment were part of it. But as the beatings got worse over the next few days, the young man had only one thought in mind - to be able to make it out alive. If he died, his cause would die with him.

The only person who could save the trio was Netaji, but he too was arrested and kept in Darjeeling. He had heard about the arrests of the boys from the Samyukta Party and knew they were his proteges, but elections were around the corner - and he was still an active member of the Indian National Congress, and couldn't be seen giving support to anyone outside the party.

From the outside, Vishnu, Amir and the rest of the crew decided to garner as much support, and they decided to sit on a peaceful protest outside the police station.

Even though they were all freedom fighters, they had rallied around the cause of religious unity, and gathered enough support from local poor and oppressed classes.

By the fourth day of their arrest, a 100 people had been gathered together by Vishnu and Amir, and there was now a large crowd outside the police station. Similarly, another large crowd had been instructed to protest outside the courts of Calcutta, to demand the release of their leader.

In the power echelons of Calcutta, the senior British officials and their Indian counterparts gathered to discuss this unraveling situation, which was slowly turning hostile on all fronts. Jaidev's group of followers was not one to be intimidated, as most had come from backgrounds that involved violence and posturing to a good extent. They just never had the opportunity to collect and focus their energies together.

Far away in Bombay, Bapu sat in a quiet building at Colaba, as Panditji sipped on some tea.

"Bapuji, this boy Jaidev, he has a lot of traits of Bhagat Singh, don't you think?"

The Mahatma paused and smiled.

"I agree, but he is different to him in many ways as well. This boy is a poet who speaks to the heart of the people."

"Well, he's got about a 100 people outside police stations and courts in Calcutta. The news of his arrest and enigma is fast spreading."

"I am afraid the British may execute him without any news. Maybe, he has already been executed", Bapuji said.

The crowd outside the police station had only increased. How was one man, who advocated religious unity and peace, be arrested, and that too without cause - only because he posed a threat to the elections ?

There was no sign of Jaidev, Satya or Deshu for over two days, and there was no news from within the prison as well. Most of the protestors had started to lose hope - and the crowd was getting anxious, and a little agitated.

That morning, there was a turn of heads as they heard a car park near to the protest spot. A young British woman emerged from the black car, and rushed towards the police station.

"I demand to see Jaidev and the men of the Samyukta Party, who have been arrested with no access to a lawyer!"

A few constables tried to stop her. "You can't go inside!"

It was Maggie - she was here to save Jaidev - just as he had many years ago by the river side. She was adamant and tried her best to gain access, but the constables wouldn't let her enter.

Soon enough, one of the British officers emerged from within the police station. "Why are you here advocating for a young man, running around as a terrorist?"

"He is not a terrorist !"

"The evidence suggests otherwise", said the officer, a middle-aged man dressed in a crisp uniform.

"I have orders here signed by Judge Daly, that the 3 men have been arrested without conviction, and that they be granted a lawyer immediately", she said, firmly.

The officer looked at the papers, surprised. "Which Judge in India would grant you such papers?"

"I have my connections, and it's only right that they get a lawyer. They deserve a fair trial."

"Well, we'll need to verify these papers."

"Surely you can verify the papers, but that shouldn't stop you from granting them a lawyer and visitation right away."

"The men are under questioning."

"Then we'll wait here an hour - but that's the longest we'll agree to you keeping them until you let us see them."

The officer shrugged.

At exactly an hour later, the officer emerged from within the station.

"You may see the men along with the lawyer."

Maggie walked in along with the gentleman in the black suit, a young Indian, ostensibly the lawyer.

Jaidev, Satya and Deshu were kept in a holding cell two basements down, and they had been tortured and beaten for the past 3 days. As Jaidev saw Maggie, his eyes lit, and with whatever little strength he had, he smiled at her.

"Jaidev, I'm going to get you out of here. The police have no case against you. Just trust me !"

Jaidev smiled. "You've always been my good friend Maggie."

And indeed, she was.

When trial was held, Maggie put forth the argument that just because a few men in the city were “harassed” under the Samyukta Party name, it did not mean that Jaidev, or anyone else of the party leadership, could be implicated. With that argument, anyone could go about making extortion or harassment calls under anyone’s name, and people could be implicated based on just hearsay.

“But it is a known fact that the Samyukta Party indulges in violence”, said the Judge.

“Well, there is not a single case against them. These men were held for no reason, tortured and beaten by the police - but where is the evidence that they harassed anyone? What good is our judicial system if it implicates anyone without a trial and evidence?”, she said.

The trial went on for a few weeks - during which time Jaidev and his comrades were given much better treatment at the prison, mainly because there was scrutiny over them. They also received a lot of media attention, and national limelight.

Three weeks later, the judge came back with his ruling.

“Based on the evidence presented before me, I hereby rule that Jaidev Singh, Satyajit Chatterjee and Deshpran Chandra are all deemed innocence. However, I further rule that due to the outlaw nature of their political party, I deem their political outfit the Samyukta Party banned, and further, the three men are barred from contesting in any election, or creating a political party, for the next 5 years.”

There was a loud, positive uproar outside the court upon hearing the acquittal of the three young men, albeit a little sombre as their political party was banned.

In his heart, a huge weight lifted off Jaidev’s shoulders, and he didn’t mind that he couldn’t run for elections or have a political party for the next 5 years. It wouldn’t have made a difference anyways - and he was going to use other tactics to achieve his goals in the coming time - his time in prison had taught him that to beat force, one must use force.

That night, all the members of the now defunct Samyukta Party celebrated, and Maggie had come as well.

RELEASE FROM PRISON

Jaidev had decided that the way ahead now was to move with force and deep will. He had seen the trials and tribulations of a tough childhood, he’d been through the tough tests campaigning for freedom and unity would bring, and he’d been sent to prison and been tortured only for doing what was right.

There were scars on his back, his legs, and his arms - scars that were never likely to go away. And he’d decided that he was going to make the British, and all of the so-called divisive and self-benefiting leaders pay. But he had to be smart - he was lucky this time, but he may not always be. After being released, he went back to the by-lanes of Barrackpore and met his friends and followers - there was Satya, Amir, Anirban, Jayadev, Rahman, Sujit and others present. They circled together to plan for the next steps they would take - and it had to be secretive, for they couldn’t be seen stirring up society right after being released.

They all decided that the way ahead was by the use of deputies - if the Samyukta Party could no longer exist, and Jaidev could no longer openly campaign, they had to have dozens of deputies who would campaign for unity and a singular fight against the British, instead of themselves.

As they planned for the next steps, a young boy barged into the room. “Jaidev bhaiya ! A clash has broken out between Muslims and Hindus ! Men are fighting with sticks and stones in the market!”

Jaidev and his 15 comrades rushed out, and saw a full scale riot going on in the area. They ran in with their own sticks, and clashed with both the sides - and began to give the rioters a beating. There were about 40 of them, 20 from each side, and Jaidev's group of 15 eventually overpowered both sides. They were careful not to seriously injure anyone, but made sure that everyone fighting was on the ground, and in pain.

As the clash quietened down, Jaidev shouted - "Why were you all fighting!"

One of the rioters, a young man of maybe 20, screamed - "These Hindus cannot be living in Barrackpore! We don't want any Hindus here!"

Another man returned the favour. "It's the Muslims who are the menace here - they need to get out of here!"

"Who started it?", Jaidev asked.

Neither side had an answer. "Who started it!", he asked again, this time in a firmer tone.

"Mohsin came to my shop and started throwing the things out!", screamed Arup.

"Liar! It was your brother Somesh who came to my shop first!", he screamed back.

"Both of you are idiots! You've been reading too much of the news- one politician says that the other religion is against us and you blindly believe them! There should be shame on you! Both your forefathers have been running shops here for over a 100 years ! Was there ever a problem?", Jaidev asked.

The beaten rioters stayed silent - they had no response.

"Give all of these idiots another thrashing!", and he and his comrades began hitting the floored rioters with sticks, albeit not very hard.

"Please, stop, please!", the rioters squealed.

"If any of you fight here again, we're going to come back and give you a much worse beating than you could imagine. Don't let us catch you again - religion means believing in God - and not fighting other humans for it! Look at us - we have Hindus and Muslims both in our group - we have Anirban, but we also have Rahman, we have Sujit, but we also have Amir - there is no difference that we see between us!"

The rioters slowly began getting up.

"We're sorry.. we won't do this again."

"Good. And if anyone tells you to fight over religion, give them a sound beating!", Jaidev said, hawkishly.

SAMYUKTA WRESTLING

Although the Samyukta Party was banned from any political activities, the wrestling club could still run - and the interest in the Samyukta movement was such that post their release from prison, Jai and the crew found an almost 5 fold increase in new trainees. They began to train them to the best of their abilities, and earnestly.

As they saw their wrestling activities increase, they were able to earn more money, and soon, began not only wrestling classes, but also skill training to local youth - whether that was carpentry, metal working or construction - along with providing basic education like reading and writing.

They received a letter from Netaji a few months post their release -

Dear Brothers,

I write to you today to thank you for what you are doing for the people. It shall pay in rich dividends in the future. We shall meet again soon.

*Yours truly,
Netaji*

The Samyukta Wrestling Center was now Samyukta Training Academy - and hundreds of students were coming in every month, some paying customers, others asking for free education. Samyukta served them both.

In the first few months after their release, Jai and his comrades did not mention political activities, for they knew they were being watched - for example, when a young man they had never seen before in the area joined them for lessons, it was clear the man had been sent by the police to monitor activities. There could be more such examples.

So, the crew kept their political dreams silent in conversations, but in heart, they all knew what they truly wished to achieve - full independence.

But they needed more people, and they needed to make Samyukta larger - a few hundred students was good for a small district - but they needed to take their movement national.

Every now and then, a few students would show up who would be exceptional in some ways or others. There was Digambar, Aziz, Khushwant, Lala, Salman, Mandeep, and several others, who'd shown capability and intelligence, and Jai would offer them elevated roles in Samyukta, before bringing them closer into the circle.

"What do you think you can do for independence?", Jai asked some of the boys once.

"I'd love to give a lift-and-throw to a British officer."

The boys laughed a little. "But what can you really do?", Jai asked, further. He was being serious. The rest of the room also took a more sober tone.

"I could do anything, if the plan made sense", said Mandeep.

Jai liked the answer. "And what about the rest?"

"I could sabotage some British trucks, or steal some goods - I know how to get into the Sadar bazaar warehouses.", Salman said.

"Interesting. Didn't know that about you, Salman."

"If we need to steal some documents, secrets, files, from the administration building, I could get us in. I work as a mechanic in a store near there. I know the way."

"Alright, I see we're now getting into specifics", said Jai.

"All this is good. But I need you to take a step back, and answer - do you see yourself fighting for the independence movement, no matter what it takes, no matter who the enemy is, no matter what the situation is?", Jai asked, firmly. He had given this life his all and expected no less from his comrades.

"Yes!", was a resounding answer from everyone.

“Good. Because we have some work, and we need men like you to work with us, so we can lead the nation to peace and prosperity.”

HATTING INTRODUCED

It was well past midnight when Lord Hatting returned to his bedroom from his study, after having spent several hours reading a very interesting novel. Lord Hatting was the Viceroy of India, living in New Delhi, and had the final say in all matters pertaining to Indian society.

In the back of his mind, though, the case of the Samyukta Party and Jaidev Singh still ran afresh. He knew that Jaidev Singh wasn't somebody who was going to back down, and that he would be back again.

He walked up to his study table, a few paces from his bed, and made a small note - “Take care of Jaidev”.

And he went to bed.

CREATION OF SAMYUKTA CITY CENTRES

Jai knew that if Samyukta was to be a force for the independence movement, they had to expand into multiple cities. He, along with Satya, Rahman, Vishnu and the others decided that they would expand into 2 new cities, and Satya and Rahman would lead 8 men each to go with them. The 8 men would be identified from within the existing team members.

“We need to pick 2 cities that aren't too big, where they have a good local network of news coverage - we go as wrestling trainers, skill trainers, and do good work - and we get the papers to write about us”, said Jai.

“And the city should also be a good political base, so we can connect with local leaders.”

“How about Madras and Indore ?”

“We'll have some trouble with the language in Madras. We don't have enough Tamil speakers”, said Satya.

“Indore sounds good though. They have a vibrant city, a royal structure, and a good British presence as well.”

The crew agreed.

“And Poona?”, asked Rahman.

“Poona, definitely. It's close to Bombay, but has it's own structures, and it would be easy to fit into the city there. Are we all agreeing on Indore and Poona?”, Vishnu asked.

And everyone agreed. Satya and Rahman would travel the next week and select locations for the centres, and have them set up within a month - Satya to Poona, and Rahman to Indore, along with eight team members each.

CHAPTER 24: MOVING TO BOMBAY

Bengal had seen the brunt of Hindu-Muslim divide in India, and after it's first divide in 1905 into East and West Bengal, it was about to go through such a turmoil once again. With Khansaab's Lahore Resolution of 1940, demanding a separate state for Muslims in India, Bengal again witnessed turmoil.

Jaidev and comrades could not be everywhere, and they could not prevent every riot that was to break out in the state. They had to delegate. They had a strong team with Vishnu, Amir, Anirban and the other boys, and each had the will and skill to perform in crisis situations.

What also concerned them was that the violence was not going to be limited to Bengal. Bombay, Gujarat and Sindh were equally susceptible, having high populations of both religions.

Jaidev decided to travel to Bombay, where he would be less recognised - and he could understand how the power centres in India really worked, as it was the centre of trade and industry, along with being a major political centre.

He'd grown a beard, trimmed his hair down, and had started wearing spectacles to change his appearance. Late one night, he left on a goods train that would stop over at multiple cities, such as Indore, before finally making its way to Bombay. It was a three day journey.

He arrived at Victoria Terminus on a rainy Tuesday morning, not quite unlike the rain that he had encountered when he first arrived at Calcutta. He had an address - a relative of one of his comrades lived in Dadar in Bombay, working as a manager at a textile mill. With his small bag of belongings, he left the station and took one of the famed Bombay buses, to Dadar.

He reached sometime in the afternoon.

Room number 34, Samant Chawl, Dadar

The chawl was in a dilapidated condition. It was probably 50 years old, and incessant rain from every season had made it lose its colour. It was, however, made of stone and was certain to survive at least another 50 years, barring a large scale war or destruction from outside forces.

He knocked on the door of Room no. 34. He heard some movement from within.

The door opened, and a lean, stone faced man opened the door. "Jaidev Singh?", he asked.

Jaidev nodded.

"Come in, please. I am Vikas Choubey", he said, as Jaidev walked in.

"Good to have you here, sir", he added.

The chawl was a small room, with beds on either side, and a small kitchen towards its back.

Jaidev settled in and Vikas made them both a cup of tea. "I've heard what you've been doing at Calcutta - and it's really commendable. The situation is the same here - both Hindu and Muslim groups are growing in number, and the differences are only rising. And it's not the general population that really wants this, but a certain section of the leaders that decide and push their button men to conduct violence."

"I know. Look, firstly, don't call me by my name here. I've changed it to Jagdeep Rana, and you are to say I'm from the Himachal state if anyone asks. Further, I need you to get me a job at one of the mills, where there is a union."

"That's not too hard. I work at the Century Mills myself. Everyone in this chawl works at one of the mills - we can get you some work soon enough, but you can't join a union right away, you have to spend some time working."

"Sure thing. At least I'll get to meet some people first."

"Great. Get some rest then. We'll head out tomorrow. I hope you've brought an umbrella."

Jaidev nodded - he had the same umbrella he'd first bought when he reached Calcutta.

In many ways, Bombay was different to Calcutta - it seemed more modern, the people seemed to be hurried and everyone seemed to be keeping to themselves. Unlike in Calcutta, where people stopped and conversed for no rhyme or reason, in Bombay most locals just kept to themselves.

Jaidev, now known as Jagdeep, and Vikas took a bus early next morning to get to the Newtown mills compound. It was a vast industrial complex, and thousands of people could be seen traversing its grounds and around it. There was a big iron gate where two guards stood on each side, and they knew Vikas.

"Who's this, Vikas?", one of them asked.

"This is Jagdeep, a relative of mine. He's come looking for work."

"Oh, another one joins the dust, I see. Well then, go along. See if you can convince Manohar bhai."

Vikas nodded. Manohar Bhai was the general manager of one of the mills.

They walked down the long road that led to the administrative office inside the mill, which was a relatively small two storied building at one of the corners of the compound. You could hear the loud sounds of the mill running, machines spinning and people passing commands and orders all throughout the area. It was a huge organism bustling with life.

The administrative building, however, was quiet on the inside. Maybe it was because it was built of thick stone, and the outside noise wouldn't get in, but upon entering the building it seemed the noise immediately dimmed, as if the volume of a radio had been turned down.

There were about 10 people working on the ground floor, each on their own desks piled with papers and files. Jaidev followed Vikas, and they went up the stairs to the second floor, where Manohar Bhai used to be seated.

Manohar Bhai's office was in the corner of the second floor, and he was the only one who had a room, although not very big, to himself.

"Yes, Vikas?", he looked up, asking, straight to the point.

"Sahab, he's Jagdeep, a distant relative from Himachal. He's looking for work."
Manohar looked at Jaidev, or rather, Jagdeep. "How much weight can you lift?"

"Sir, I could lift 100 kgs on my back if needed to."

Manohar laughed a little. "Can you do it all day? I need a few loaders for our trucks. If you can do it for 10 hours today, you'll be paid a rupee in the evening. Then we can discuss permanent employment."

Jaidev agreed. He needed a way into the mills and the unions, and he had to prove himself. He started right away - plus being a loader he would meet other strong and able men. Vikas took him to the warehouse where he was supposed to begin work. "Alright then, Jagdeep - have a good day ahead. I'll see you in the evening."

Jaidev's immediate manager was a burly, middle-aged man - Kamal. He'd spent 20 years as a loader, and now that he was in his 40s, he'd made it to manager where he didn't have to pick heavy loads - he only needed to manage the people that did. There were 6 other loaders with Jaidev, and everybody was concerned only with work, and most were stone faced as they went about it.

The trucks were full of sacks of all different kind of items, and the loaders' task was to empty whatever was in the truck, and fill it up with sacks of cotton and other goods. It was never ending - just as one truck with completed, another truck came in to take it's place.

Jaidev worked diligently for the next few weeks, and he was soon recognised by his co-workers and Kamal that he was somebody who could be depended upon. During the breaks, he'd sit with his co-workers and have tea, and make small talk.

What his real goal was to understand how the mills worked - how did they function, who were the key people, how did money go in and go out - the mills were the lifeline of Bombay and understanding all the fine grain details was what Jaidev was after.

He soon gained knowledge that the accounts department was held in a separate building altogether, only having enough cash to manage day to day expenses. It was a building with several security guards with guns, but it was only petty cash that could really be accounted for over here.

Almost all the workers were Indian, although a few British administrators did come in, every few days or so. Jaidev found out that they were from the revenue department, ensuring that the mills were functioning in fine order - after all, the mills were a major source of revenue for them.

The union heads were the ceremonial leaders of all workers of the factory - they were the ones who most workers went to in case of disputes, wages and pay raises. But for many years they had been lax with their attitude, and were more in tandem with the mill owners and authorities than the workers themselves. Raghunath and Nandan were the two union leaders at the Newtown mills - it was almost impossible to meet them, they sat in the same administrative building as the senior management of the Newtown owners.

Jaidev was now one of the thousands of workers who earned a living at the Newtown compound. He'd also learnt enough about the city of Bombay during his first few months there, and regularly wrote to Satya, Vishnu and the rest of the crew about his updates. Post the Lahore resolution, the mills were among the few places in Bombay where Hindus and Muslims congregated and worked together, including socialising, but after work most used to go their own ways.

By now, Jaidev had learnt that Bapu, Khansaab, Nehru and other stalwart leaders of Indian politics lived around the same Nepean sea road area, whenever they were in Bombay. They used to live in bungalows of rich and powerful Indian businessmen and traders.

The British lived in the more southern, older areas of Colaba. The rest of Bombay was a different world, scattered with chawls and small apartment complexes. Jaidev now knew how Bombay worked, what the key power centres were, and where important areas of the city were located.

Satya, Vishnu and Amir had been steadily building small support networks across Calcutta, Indore, Delhi and Madras, the four cities where Britain employed key power centres. After building some cash reserves by robbing British run stores across the cities, they were now prepared to take things to the next level. The plan was to begin a forceful oppression of Britishers across India, by stopping them from doing their daily activities and tasks.

All along, barring the revolution of 1857, the Indian common man bore the brunt of revolution - he would go on the hunger strike, he would refuse to go to work, he would be the one who would argue his cause - now, the Ekta group would put the onus on the British.

It was to be a calculated event - not a one off, like when Bhagat Singh had shot a police officer, but gotten immediately arrested - no, this was to be a major event, one that would rock the British empire all the way up to London, where they were already facing challenges looming from World War 2.

It had been three months since Jaidev had been gone, but as expected, Satya received a letter from him one October morning.

"It's time to let the birds fly".

It's all the letter said. It didn't have a name, a sender's address, or any further information - all it had was that one sentence.

Satya contacted Vishnu, Amir and the rest of the boys, and they decided to set the wheels in motion.

"Do you know what ever came about of that one boy and his troupe of radicals, the Samyukta Party? The ones who were arrested in Calcutta but eventually released?", asked Lord Hatting, at a meeting of senior British officials.

"Those boys were playing around, not knowing what they were getting into. I think the police action got them to back down completely.", said Officer Mitchell, one of the senior advisors to Hatting.

"Quite the contrary, I don't think they were playing around at all. And the fact that they've gone completely quiet after their release, I think they've got something brewing under the hood."

"Well sir, we should then pay them a visit, we have their addresses in Calcutta."

"Do that. And get me a report by Thursday."

"Sure thing, sir."

The Inquisitive Enforcer

Indore was a city with numerous British officials, and it's royal family had historically been quite active with the foreigners, engaging in trade and commerce that resulted in lakhs of annual revenue for both the British and the royal family.

Amir had been in Indore for 3 weeks now, and he'd been keeping a track of one Officer Adams, who was in charge of taxation activities in Indore. Adams was provided round the clock security by the British army, and he moved around in a protected cavalcade wherever he went. Rumor had it, that he knew every local trader and businessman's secrets, weaknesses and pain points, and was easily ready to apply the pressure if he needed to draw more revenue for the Crown at any given point.

He had a lot of enemies locally, but no one ever dared speak up, for it would bring the wrath of a disdainful but clever man.

Amir used to observe his movements daily. He'd come to Indore as a small time salesman of Kashmiri silk, and taken up residence in the city centre, near the administrative offices and markets. He'd brought in some samples as gifts, and a little bit of stock to keep up appearance.

After building some credibility with the local shopkeepers, who were impressed with the quality of silk Amir brought, he spent the next few weeks going around and showcasing his product to the wives and daughters of rich families of Indore. Immediately, he drew a positive response - he'd brought the highest quality of silk with him, after all.

It was through this association that he came upon meeting Adams' wife. Like most British living in India, she was quite enamoured by all the fine things the country had to offer - and after Amir had

sold a few shawls to the wife of a major dry fruits trader, he'd received an invite to showcase his products to Adams' wife, Audrey.

It was the opportunity he was waiting for. He asked for some time to replenish his stock before he met Lady Adams, so that he could bring forth his best products to her. He wrote to Arup, meanwhile, to join him in Indore as soon as possible, bringing some Kashmiri silk and shawls with him in the process.

Arup was there in a matter of a week, waiting on queue.

Together, they stacked together all their stock, almost two bagful of silk, and hopped on a horsecar, which would take them to the Adams' home. The house was well secured, with guards at the gate, and several guards patrolling the lawns as well. There may well have been six guards at the time at the house.

The two supposed Kashmiri traders were welcomed well by Audrey, and she asked them to come inside the house. A perfect opportunity, they thought. They were frisked by the guards, and their bags of goods were checked to look for any potential weapons. Nothing was found, and they entered the home with Audrey.

The Adams' home was a single storied bungalow, with three or four bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen and a servants quarter. As Amir and Arun entered, they looked around, noticing some of the artefacts and decorations, but more importantly, noting how many people other than were at home. There was one servant, a middle aged woman, and Amir noticed a gardener was outside pruning the lawns. Barring the two guards at the gate and the two around the perimeter, there was no other security, and more importantly, no pet dogs or cats.

Amir displayed all the products with a great enthusiasm - as if he were a true dealer. Arun supported him along every step of the way, bringing out every product and speaking of it's fancy with true energy. Lady Adams was truly impressed.

"These are really beautiful. I'd like to take two of these."

"Definitely madam. Let me show you another."

And they continued on, with the lady truly engrossed - so much so that when Amir asked if he could use the restroom, she directed him to the one inside the house.

Amir was careful to note all the rooms, windows and hallways of the home, and could see that the Adams' bedroom was the one on the right side, down the hallway. He quietly went into one of the rooms and unlatched a window.

He went back to the living room and continued showcasing the products to Lady Adams with Arun.

They left after making enough sales and money that could last them a month. Alas, they would have happily shown all the products to Lady Adams even if they wouldn't have made any sales.

Late that night, when it was past midnight, Amir and Arun approached the Adams' bungalow. There was a guard at the gate, and possibly two or three patrolling inside. The bungalow wall was high and pieced with glass and nails, but not something these two men couldn't scale.

They hopped the wall from a dark corner of the property, and slowly proceeded towards bungalow. They saw a guard on one side and avoided him.

The unlatched window was still open - and they entered the premises. There were two guards inside the perimeters, and both were subdued and handcuffed in a quiet, calculated manner.

That night, Officer Adams and his wife were abducted in their own vehicle, from their own home, and taken to a remote forest area outside of Indore.

The Royal Bodyguard

Vishnu had travelled to Lucknow along with Rahman, and after some research, headed into one of the famous local akhadas known for providing bodyguards.

“We’re from Haryana, and have come here looking for work”, said Vishnu, as he was questioned by the manager, Daljit, as to what brought them there. Daljit was a fit man in his 50s and ran the akhada, doubling as not just the manager but also the head trainer.

The centre was a breeding ground for potential candidates who wished to work as bodyguards, and Vishnu and Rahman had done their homework.

“If you’re looking for work, there’s none here”, replied Daljit.

Vishnu nodded, then looked at Rahman, and said, “I guess we’ll have to try at Ramchand’s then”.

Ramchand was Daljit’s main competitor - and hearing his name got Daljit slightly irritated. He didn’t want to lose potentially good candidates to a competitor.

“Well, we’ll give you a try. Let’s see what you can do on the wrestling ground.”

Vishnu and Rahman had been wrestling for years, and knew martial arts such as judo, karate and taekwondo - this is exactly what they wanted. They followed Daljit into the training area, where there were about 10 heavily built men lifting weights and training.

“Atiq, get ready, I need you to test out this man”, Daljit said to one his wrestlers, looking at Vishnu. Atiq was about 10 kgs heavier than Vishnu. They both got ready and took to the muddied ground.

It wasn’t a straightforward contest but Vishnu eventually had his competitor floored. Daljit was highly impressed. Rahman took on another wrestler by the name of Sandeep, and they were about the same size - Rahman finished the contest within two minutes.

Daljit was even more impressed. “Where have you boys come from?”, he asked.

“We’re from Kurukshetra, that’s where we trained. But we’ve lived in different areas all our lives.”

Daljit knew that these two boys weren’t disclosing everything, as was the case with almost everyone who worked in their industry. He decided to give them a chance. Besides, he had some open positions to fill.

“Alright, I have work for you, but you’re going to have to prove yourself. We need four men patrolling spice warehouses during the night time, so one of you will be assigned there along with the rest of the team. And I have another requirement for a team to work on a zamindar’s property.”

Daljit assigned them to separate positions and teams to keep them from colluding in any kind of activity together.

“What about the pay?”, asked Vishnu.

“You’ll get 2 rupees for every shift you work.”

Vishnu and Rahman agreed happily - “That sounds good.”

Over the next few weeks, they diligently took every shift they got, making a note of all the clients that Daljit had, the locations and people they guarded and what kind of assignments were typically received.

They were always made to work separately so the only time they got to meet was during their off-shifts, but they made the most of whatever time they had in planning.

Two months passed, and all they did was regular work, sometimes being involved in small scuffles but most people happy to just avoid anyone who walked around or had bodyguards present. And then one night, opportunity presented itself.

Vishnu was assigned along with three other men to protect the administrative buildings of Seth Gajendra's factory compound, when a British official started visiting the premises along with Seth Gajendra himself after office hours, presumably to go through some accounts, paperwork and possibly underhanded dealings.

After three days, Vishnu noticed that the Britisher wasn't coming in to discuss work, but rather him and Gajendra used to drink alcohol and play cards in the building premises till late in the night. They used to come only with a driver, and no other security or bodyguards.

Vishnu realised that they had an opportunity here, if only he could get Rahman to take up a shift with him one of the evenings - they could work in tandem and kidnap the two men, as had always been the plan.

And so, before the shift on the fourth evening, Rahman slipped into one of Vishnu's team mates home, and dropped in some sleeping pills in his water. The man didn't show up to work, but somehow, miraculously, Rahman was walking along with Vishnu as they reached the factory compounds.

When the fourth man didn't arrive, Vishnu's two other team mates agreed that they needed four men on the job, and agreed to take Rahman along instead.

Vishnu and Rahman reached the factory that evening, and as expected, the Britisher and Gajendra arrived again, by around 8 PM. Gajendra now had recognised Vishnu by face, but hadn't seen Vishnu before so as they passed by the building entrance, he asked, albeit in an informal tone - "New guy?"

Rahman nodded.

Gajendra noticed Rahman was just as well built as Vishnu was, and acknowledged, "Daljit seems to have the toughest of the lot, don't you think?", he asked the Britisher. "Yes, a good lot indeed. I've asked him to send some men over for my group of friends coming in next week as well."

And the two men entered the building, disappearing into the stairways as Vishnu and Rahman waited outside.

Within an hour, they had incapacitated the driver who'd driven them in, and tied and handcuffed the man and locked him up in the building. They then waited for the two men to come outside after they were done drinking, which was usually an hour or so after midnight.

As expected, the two men did come, intoxicated and in jolly spirits, and they didn't realise that their driver had been replaced with Vishnu, and that Rahman was sitting in the front seat as well.

"I hope you don't mind if we drop this man outside the compound."

Both Gajendra and the Britisher were too intoxicated to care. "Just get us home."

The two men were driven to a remote area outside the city, and when they woke up in the morning their hands and mouths were tied and gagged, with Vishnu watching over them.

"Don't worry - if everything goes as planned, you won't be harmed."

The Delhi Connection

Lord Hatting was getting anxious with each passing day, that he'd not heard from Jaidev or any of his crew ever since they'd been released. Surely, such a lot wouldn't keep silent. But it was as if they had disappeared off the face of the earth - there was no sign of them, no protest, no news from anyone of their party.

Hatting was not new to this, however - he'd spent half his life in the intelligence services for the monarchy, and he knew for a fact something was amiss. The only plausible explanation was that the group was had assumed different identities, was living in different cities, and was upto a plan much bigger than one they'd taken up earlier.

It was a chilly morning in Delhi when he first received news of the missing Officer and his wife from Indore, the Adams'. They'd been kidnapped from their home in the middle of the night and the guards had been carefully tied up, as if the perpetrators had been trained and knew what they were doing.

Not typical in India, he thought, where most criminals operated with force, and not calculation.

A search was launched in Indore and the royal family assisted in every way possible, but it had been a few days and there was no sign of them. Newspapers had been instructed to keep the media frenzy to a minimum, and hysteria had to be avoided.

A week later, Hatting was informed that one British businessman, John Franklin, had gone missing in Lucknow, along with his trade partner. The dots seemed to be presenting themselves to Hatting.

A few days later, there was news that two British administrators were missing from Poona - and the day after that, further news of two British navy sailors missing from Madras arrived. By now, there were a total of 7 Britishers missing in the Indian subcontinent.

This was unheard of - and it had to be the actions of a cold, calculative group - in Hatting's mind, it was most definitely the Samyukta Party, the group that had disappeared after their release from prison.

More bad news arrived - a British family was missing from Lahore, another group of administrators who had gone to Assam on a vacation had been missing for more than two weeks.

It was difficult to contain the anxiety and hysteria was to soon follow. There were now a total of 22 Britishers, and 8 Indians, all of whom were associated with the missing British, missing. As expected, Hatting received the dreaded phone call from King George late one morning.

"What's going on there Hatting? Is the safety of our people not possible anymore?", he asked, in a firm and commanding tone.

"We're working on it, your Highness. It's been a calculated attack by a group we believe we're familiar with", he replied, his voice apologetic, not usual for a man of his stature.

"Well, you better do your job, and get those people back - families are worried here in England, especially with the war going on, the night time air raids, and now we've got this - fix this by the end of the month."

"Certainly, your highness."

And the call was cut abruptly.

Lord Hatting sat in his study, thinking with a clear mind what to do next. Surely, with the scale of operations ongoing, the abducted should be found soon.

The calls for separate states for Muslims were growing across India, with Khansaab leading the charge. He wielded considerable clout over many of the religious clerics and groups - and in turn, they held considerable power of the people of their respective areas and districts.

Bapu had tried, throughout 1944, to appease Khansaab and attempt to stop him from demanding separate states for Muslims. While Khansaab had been unrelenting, Bapu had visited him at his residence at Bombay dozens of times, where they had closed door talks - none of which amounted to anything, except Khansaab increasing his demand for separate states. Nehru and other Congress leaders had opposed these demands, but Khansaab had been as headstrong as a bull - besides, a demand for separate states was what kept him relevant in political circles.

Jaidev had been following the news about Bapu, Nehru, Sardar Patel and Khansaab for several years. Everything he heard had always disgusted him - all these leaders spoke of strength and freedom, but nothing they did ever amounted to any results. The British only kept looting more, the rich kept getting richer, and the political leaders kept influencing people one way or another.

All that ever happened, Jaidev thought, was that Nehru or Bapu would be sent to prison for a few weeks or months, and then they would be released. In fact, Khansaab never even went to prison, and neither did any leaders of the Muslim League - it raised questions in Jaidev's mind as to whether Khansaab and the League really did want freedom from the British or whether they were only serving their own cause.

Regardless, Jaidev was a man of action, and he knew in his heart the world would soon see differently, and that he'd bring a new light on the horizon.

CHAPTER 25: FIRST COMMUNICATION

C. Rajagopal was a journalist with the Indian Express, one of the most popular and largest in circulation newspapers of India. He was an honest journalist, and he wrote about the most pressing of issues, such as poverty and oppression, with genuine empathy and concern.

It was only fitting that he received the first letter from Jaidev.

"We have the 22 Britishers."

Rajagopal read the letter, his mind fixated and blank at the same time.

Dear Mr. Rajagopal,

We will not be revealing who we are right now, but let us inform you, the 22 Britishers abducted across India in the past 2 months are with us. They are safe and healthy, and our purpose is not mindless violence.

We do not believe in the differences of religion, cast, creed and colour - we only want freedom, and unity amongst all people. Progress should be factor that everyone strives towards.

Yet, in this country, in today's times, it seems it takes gunshots for voices to be heard. Consider this as the first of many letters that you shall receive, and we trust you shall do the needful. We look forward to reading your response on tomorrow's print.

With Best Regards

There were no demands, no further details, and no further revelations in the letter. Rajagopal tried to look for any signs where it may have come from, but there were none. It could have been sent from anywhere in India.

He headed to the office immediately.

Jaidev's letter was front page news on *The Indian Express* the next day. This was 1944, and Bapu and Khansaab were regularly meeting to discuss communal unity. These were events of great fanfare, with a lot of media attention - but when Jaidev's letter had shown up, the entire country's attention shifted.

Already, there was enough media attention on the 22 missing Britishers - now, it was almost a suspense story that would slowly unravel.

Jaidev was with Vikas as they discussed the next plan of action. They had just received a letter from Satya.

Dear brothers,

The gifts are with me, and I am keeping them safely. We saw the flying bird yesterday, it seems it's going to go all across the country now. It's good news.

All is well,

Your brother

Jaidev and Vikas had received several such letters from the rest of the team - their plan was moving ahead successfully.

Lord Hatting was not even slightly amused by the arrogance of the kidnapers.

"The confidence of these rats!", he screamed to the group of officers, all standing in submissive manner.

The original letter sent by Jaidev was with him - he had been handed all documents and details pertaining to the case by the officers assigned.

"Get all possible forensics on this letter, find out where it was posted from, find out which postman picked up the delivery, which postman delivered it, I need everything ! Get on it, now.", he ordered the team of senior officers.

A nationwide hunt had begin.

All newspapers were printing daily updates on the matter, how many police officers were involved, and what were all the updates pertaining to the case.

"It's a team of at least a 100, I tell you!", Lord Hatting would often tell his subordinates. "This is cold, calculated kidnapping. You find one, you'll find all", he would say.

In his heart, something told him this was the doing of the Samyukta Party - those same radicals who had disappeared off the face of the Earth.

"Did you get any updates on anyone from the Samyukta Party?", Hatting asked a team of police generals.

“James Elvoy, Ronald Woods, James Sheffield, Kevin Jones... no, none of these names would cut it”, Jaidev shrugged, looking at Vikas.

“All these men are Britishers, and some are officers of good standing, but none are names big enough to stir up the waters. If we do what we’re planning to do, these names just wont cut it.”

Vikas agreed.

“We need to do a Rash Behari Bose”, Jaidev added.

Just then, there was a knock on the door - one of Jaidev’s close confidantes came to see him one morning, all the way from Indore. Gurtej was a Punjabi man who had been working with the Samyukta Party for several years.

“They’ve got photographs and sketches of you, Vishnu and Satya, shared amongst all the police stations”.

“So they’ve smartened up, is it?”

“Yes, and they even sent for some of the constables from Calcutta to describe your mannerisms to the other officers. Even all of us clerks were given the full description. They say Lord Hatting is personally overlooking the investigation.”

“Lord Hatting, you say?”

“Yes, the Viceroy. He served in the British Special Forces.”

“Well, looks like our sketches are going to be on the newspapers soon. The Brits are getting desperate. This is good.”

“I know another place we could hide in Palghar, what do you think?”, Vikas asked.

“No, no, we don’t need to hide anymore. It’s time I take a trip now.”

“Where are you going to go?”

“Delhi.”

The Capital Attack

It was a blistering summer day when Jaidev landed in the capital. His photographs were still not printed on the newspapers, but he knew they would soon be. He had to make his move fast.

Another letter had been sent to Rajagopal in the meanwhile.

Our demands are simple. We want the banning of political factions that call for division of this country based on religion, and we want the British to leave our land. Is it too complicated to ask?

The people who demand a separate land for Muslims, why do they only reside in Bombay ? Why doesn't the common Muslim, demand the same? Or the Hindu hardliner, why doesn't the average Hindu also demand for a separate land? Why don't the average, regular people get as much importance as the loud, aggressive politician who simply seeks to stay in power ?

It's because these are simple political gimmicks, created by the British, and supported by a small faction of our people, serving their own interests.

The 22 Britishers shall be duly released when all political organisations demanding a division of this country are banned and forbidden. Once this becomes a law, the prisoners, who are alive, well and healthy, shall be released.

The entire country was speaking about this letter, and it had roused a lot of interest among the people.

Lord Hatting was now certain this was a doing of Jaidev and his comrades - after all, it was what they had demanded earlier as well.

The day after this letter was printed, photographs of Jaidev, Satya and Vishnu were shared on every newspaper in India. Lord Hatting was falling behind his foe, and he mobilised an additional 1000 soldiers across India to look for his nemesis.

Jaidev had foreseen the scenario, and he already had a move in mind.

Lord Hatting retired for the night after a long day - he'd been working for the past 16 hours, looking for leads and possible links that would take them to Jaidev and his group of outlaws.

It was not to be required.

As Lord Hatting lit the lamp in his study room, he noticed a faint shadow at a corner. He noticed shoes, and the shadow slowly moved.

"I believe you've been looking for me."

The light of the lamp slowly lit up the room. Hatting recognised Jaidev.

"I see you've made it here. Well, this is as far you get."

"Before you raise an alarm, I assure you, if my comrades don't hear of my wellbeing by tomorrow morning, all 22 hostages will be killed. Besides, there will be carnage in the country."

"So you're terrorists of some kind, is it?"

"No, you are the terrorists. We're only here to cleanse."

"What do you want from me?", Hatting asked, curious as to why Jaidev showed himself up here.

"You're a powerful person. You can make change."

"I read your letter in the papers this morning. It is not us who wants to divide the country, it's the people themselves."

"The people don't want anything - its just a handful of politicians."

"So you want us to ban all the organisations demanding a separate country for Muslims?"

"I want you to prevent division and bloodshed."

Hatting stayed silent.

"Well, I know our meeting here in this room is not going to make any difference. I just need to let you know, my comrade is in the next room with your wife and grandson, sitting with a knife. You see, we're not afraid to die."

"What do you want?!", Hatting questioned him again.

“Take a short walk. Go outside your home, and walk towards the market square two hundred yards from here. It’s dead of the night. Tell your guards you just need to take a walk. I’ll see you there. If I don’t see you, consider yourself responsible for the carnage that ensues.”

And saying that, Jaidev hopped off the window, and disappeared into the night.

Lord Hatting was the exact big fish they needed to catch. Faced with the threat of losing his wife and grandson to the “radicals”, as he so thought, he’d shown up at the market square that night, where Jaidev, along with three of his comrades, was waiting. In an inconspicuous horse cart, they’d taken him to the outskirts of Delhi, somewhere along the route to Agra. Hatting had no idea where he was being taken; he was tied and gagged the whole way.

It took a two days for the newspapers to print Hatting’s disappearance.

This was now an issue of the highest magnitude - first, there were 22 Britishers who were already kidnapped and their whereabouts unknown, now, the Viceroy of India had gone missing. On one side, Britain had the World War to contend with, on the other, the events in India were going out of hand.

Another letter landed at Rajagopal’s home. It simply said:

We have Hatting.

The parliament was in ruckus, every police station was on high alert, every soldier on the lookout. But Jaidev and his comrades had hidden away so deep in the vast jungles all around India, that finding them was becoming a task much greater than anyone had anticipated.

The Indian Express, and other newspapers, printed out a plea, ordered by the government:

We request whoever it is that had conducted these kidnappings, to come forward, and present their demands. If the demands are reasonable, we are willing to sit at the negotiation table. If there is the ask of a ransom, we are willing to listen, and may accede.

We deeply condone acts of criminal nature and violence, and would like to have closure on this most pressing issue at hand, as soon as possible.

Jaidev’s reply was sent instantly - the very next day -

Our demands are simple and straightforward:

- 1. We want abolishment of all taxes paid to the British.*
- 2. We want banning of groups that demand separate statehood for separate religions.*
- 3. We want assurance, in writing, that once the above two demands are met, we will not be prosecuted.*

Now that the demands were on the table, the British government and their Indian officials all congregated and discoursed to find a plan of action.

Bapu came out with a statement, saying, “If these men believe that violence and criminal acts shall get us freedom and peace, they are mistaken. Non-violence is the only way of life that shall last.”

Khansaab came with a statement of his own, "They demand to have us banned, but such elements are the reason we exist ! Our religion is our way of life, and we need a state where such elements cannot live, thrive or exist - this is why we ask for our own land!"

Many other political leaders came with their own statements and reasoning - but it was surprising that nobody openly supported their cause. Surprising, because the first demand was the abolishment of taxes paid to the British.

And yet, in quiet circles, there were some who supported the kidnappings and the demands. Several elite, royals and upper class Indians were in awe of the audacity of the entire situation - within a matter of two months, the entire nation had been turned on it's head. There were no other words to describe it.

Jaidev had moved to Agra, and although his photograph, along with Vishnu's and Satya's had been printed in many newspapers and shared across many police stations, he was almost unrecognisable, having lost a good amount of weight, having grown his hair long and his beard unkempt.

He knew nothing would come about of his demands, not for the first few days at least, but he was willing to play the long game. He knew could keep his hostages for several weeks, or months, if needed - and he was willing to wait.

He would reveal himself when the time was right.

CHAPTER 26: PUBLIC RESPONSE

The Imperial Legislative Council was in turmoil the next few days. Every leader was planning for how to respond to the demands of the "terrorists", "radicals" and "enemy". They had a faint idea as to who it could be, the members of the Samyukta Party, but they couldn't be for sure - and they certainly didn't want any loss of lives - the World War was already tumultuous enough, and such news coming from one of the key resource pools of the empire, the Indian subcontinent, would ruffle more than just a few feathers.

The first demand was so audacious that it almost drew laughter from many circles.

And yet, with the Indian public, there seemed to grow an affection for the people who kidnapped the Britishers.

In Bombay, Delhi, Lucknow, Jaipur and several other cities, small gatherings had begun to take place, in support of the "radicals". Nobody knew who they were - but people had started showing support.

For the time being, however, Jaidev was more interested in delving into the mind of Hatting, to learn of secrets, and to find out which areas could be used to further hurt the British in India. Yet, they ensured that no form of torture would be conducted. Hatting had been tied and kept in a small cave section deep in the forests of the United Provinces, an area Jaidev had scouted himself. There was virtually no possibility of anyone finding them here - just as there was nothing more than a remote possibility of anyone finding the rest of the 22 Britishers.

"Look, Hatting, we are not going to hurt you. But you have to understand, you're our leverage", said Jaidev, as two of his comrades looked on.

Hatting kept quiet, the lines on his face squinting a little.

“We will keep you here for a while, a few weeks, or maybe months. But you can make your time here easier - by telling us things which may benefit us.”

“There’s nothing I can tell you that’ll be of any use to you”, Hatting replied.

“Oh, but it will - I’m sure there’s a lot you can tell us. You see, we’re not going to hurt you, but being tied up the way you are, seated on an uncomfortable chair, for days, weeks, months - this can take a toll. I assure you - because I’ve been in the same place, just like you”, Jaidev smiled, looking into Hatting’s eyes.

“If you tell us useful things, however - we can make your time here a little easier. You might be able to get up, walk around, maybe even lie down for a nap, from time to time. It’s really up to you”, he added.

Jaidev’s two comrades, young and brutish, sneered and laughed a little.

“So, Hatting, what’s it going to be?”, Jaidev asked.

It took two days, until Hatting decided he’d had enough and had to give them some information. He’d been tied on a chair, in the same position, with very little blood flow to his arms and legs. He realised if he didn’t speak, he could lose the loss of his limbs and maybe even his life - he had to move around to get the blood circulating in his body.

“I’ll tell you, I’ll tell you something. Just let me stand up, please.”, Hatting pleaded.

Jaidev and his comrades obliged. Hatting could feel his arms and legs again.

“There are three black carriages that leave from the Rajghat area in Delhi every Thursday, carrying taxes in gold and silver that are paid to the British government from the trader’s unions of that area. One of the carriages has the gold and silver, the other two are decoys. The carriages only have one armed guard inside, so as to not draw attention. You can rob one of them and easily get up to 10 kilograms of gold. The correct carriage is the one that leads to Minto Road - the locations change every time but the one for this coming week will be going to Minto Road.”, said Hatting, the colour slowly returning to his pale face.

Jaidev raised his eyebrows. “You think we’re petty robbers, Hatting?”

Hatting stayed silent, not knowing what to say.

“If we were after some money and gold, there would’ve been a hundred different ways we could’ve stolen it. That’s not what we are looking for.”

Jaidev stood up and took a short pace across the area, stretching himself as well.

“We need names, Hatting. We need to know who the key people are that run your cause of creating chaos and disorder in this country - whether they are British, or Indian. We know Khansaab openly demands a Muslim nation, and we know the few underlings he has. We know there are certain Hindu hardline groups that demand that same - but we need names from you, as to who the unnamed people are, those who carry out the tasks on the street - the goons, the gang leaders, the troublemakers disguising themselves as union chiefs and trades leaders and so on”, Jaidev said.

“But I don’t know who these people are...”, Hatting replied.

“We’ll give you a few more days to think this over. Let’s get you back on the seat, shall we”, Jaidev quipped.

“Meanwhile, I shall go and get the gold which you just told us about.”

Jaidev's comrades acknowledged, as Hatting was brought back onto the chair and shoved and tied up.

"Please..", he said.

The comrades laughed a little.

"This one's for India, Mr. Hatting."

Jaidev had not expected the people to rise as they had. He had expected to have to fight the battle alone, with this team of several hundred comrades, but public support was another thing altogether. He'd reached back into Delhi the evening prior, and the morning newspapers were full of reports and analyses as to who the kidnappers could be.

Some of the Hindi dailies even went on to shower praise -

"They are doing what should have been done long ago. In the names of Rash Behari Bose and Bhagat Singh, the spirit of these so called radicals lives on, and we support their cause of rejecting British rule and religious division. This is the uprising of 1857 all over again, but this time, it's much more powerful."

Jaidev smiled as he read the news. He felt a little proud of himself, but he was quick to remember that there was still a big task at hand.

Khansaab and many other leaders had been openly dismissing this group's demands.

"Who will protect the Muslim if we don't get our own state ? The Hindu majority will wipe us out!"

Several other Muslim leaders echoed the same - their followers screaming slogans in unison.

There were some leaders of the Congress as well, who raised their voice in disagreement to the "radicals" actions. These were typically leaders who had vested interests in working with the British, who had extensive business relations with them, and would lose out on power and commerce if such unison was seen among the people.

Bapuji was quick to dismiss the actions of these young men, saying again, that "Violence only begets violence, and this will not solve anything - it will only exacerbate the actions of religious separation and British repression."

It was Bapuji's statement that really got Jaidev thinking - Bapuji had a lot of followers, and his statements were widely accepted all throughout India. Being dismissed by Bapuji meant that either Bapuji himself was supporting the British and religious extremists in some way, or that Bapuji had misunderstood Jaidev and his comrades' completely.

In either ways - a response was required - and it had to be more than just a letter to the newspapers this time.

CHAPTER 27: AZAD MAIDAN

India in 1945 was undergoing drastic changes - the British were already finding it difficult to maintain control over the subcontinent, the Muslim League was demanding a separate country for themselves, and the Indian National Congress was trying to ensure that when power was transferred from the British, they were the first in line to receive. It was not a question now of if power would be transferred, but the question was of when.

Jaidev knew this, and now that his actions had gained public recognition and support, he had to make a next move, one that would be of substantial nature.

Rajagopal received another anonymous letter in a few days that followed.

We will be revealing ourselves at Azad Maidan, Bombay, on the 20th of March. We hope to see you all there.

The letter was short, to the point, and had no further details. Rajagopal hurried to the press, screaming, "Stop print! Stop print! We have new information!" .

The Indian Express was the only one to print the letter the next day, and it resulted in the largest ever sales that the newspaper had experienced. They ran out of copies nationwide within 20 minutes of circulation - many people bought the paper not just to read the news but to keep this as a souvenir for years to come - some of the intellectuals and political thinkers of India had already begun to see this as a watershed moment.

Lord Hatting was missing, so were 22 other Britishers, along with a dozen or so Indians - but it almost seemed like the kidnappings had been forgotten, and the only curiosity that remained was over "Who were these crazy people that had done this?"

It was at the crack of dawn on 20th of March that police officers, soldiers and other administrators arrived at Azad Maidan. They were there in the dozens, if not hundreds, securing the maidan's perimeters, nearby areas and keeping a watch on all activities. They took positions and kept an eager watch all around. Common citizens had been instructed to avoid the areas around Colaba, for nobody knew whom to expect, and in what number.

An hour went past. The sun shone brightly. The officers kept watch, standing their ground, weapons in hand. There was near silence around the area. The kidnappers could show up at any time. Some of the soldiers and officers supported the demands these "radicals" had made, but dare not say anything in public.

There was no sign of any one coming towards the maidan, until a young boy, around 12 or 13 years of age, came running towards the ground.

"Long live the Samyukta Party! Long live the Samyukta Party!"

His screams were the only sound around the vast area. His voice echoed through the grounds, and the officers and soldiers were all alerted. The boy ran towards the ground, and rushed past the entrance, screaming his lungs out as he ran through the ground.

The boy was eventually stopped by a few guards.

"Who sent you here! Who is this Samyukta Party?!"

The boy looked the guards in the eyes. "They're on their way."

A faint sound of marching footsteps could be heard from the distance. All the officers were alerted, but the sound was coming from all directions. They went into alert mode.

The sound of the footsteps grew louder. A few soldiers rushed in from the outer perimeters of the maidan - "Crowd incoming! Crowd incoming!"

And there they were - not a dozen, not a few dozen, but hundreds of men, all wearing white kurtas and trousers, marching towards the ground. There may have been 500 of them, there may have been more - the security had not pre-empted such a number to turn up. All administrators and officers had expected a few dozen, and they had planned to arrest them the moment they'd shown up at the maidan.

This number of men was much beyond their expectation.

Jaidev, Satya, Rahman, Vishnu, Amir, Desho, Bandhu - they were all there - along with their hundreds of supporters. They walked into the maidan as if they owned the city, and nobody tried to stop them, simply standing in awe.

“Long live Samyukta Party! Long live Samyukta Party!”, they all screamed.

Jaidev and his key comrades took to the centre of the ground. A megaphone was brought to them, and Jaidev took to addressing everyone present. In a matter of a few seconds, the maidan area had gone from eerily quiet to one of bustling chaos. Residents from the nearby apartment complexes had come out of their balconies, and people had begun to walk towards the maidan to catch a glimpse of what was going on.

Jaidev took to the megaphone.

“My fellow countrymen! We have been speaking to you over the past several weeks via the newspapers - and we thank you for the love you have shown us! We are not criminals, and we are not terrorists, or radicals, like they call us - we are simple people, just like everyone else. All we ask for is freedom and peace for our beloved country. Is that too much to ask?”

The crowd roared - “No! Peace and freedom! Peace and freedom!”

The policemen and soldiers looked on. Their seniors had instructed them to wait and watch, to allow this huge crowd to speak - they couldn't afford turning this situation on its head. It was apparent that many of the men in the crowd were armed, and any police action would result in retaliation, considering this group's past actions.

Journalists and reporters were aplenty at the maidan, and each was intently listening to what was being said.

Jaidev continued. “Our demands are clear. Firstly, we want no further tax to be paid to the British government this year. Our money is being used to fight a war we are not part of, and our people are being sent to die at the behest of the British. Second, we want banning of all religious separatist groups, and third, we want written assurance that we shall not be prosecuted, once we return the hostages. I assure you, all hostages are safe and sound - and it is now dependent on the British authorities on how this situation plays out!”

The crowd screamed back in unison - “Peace and freedom! Peace and freedom!”

Jaidev and his close comrades screamed back along with them - “Peace and freedom!”

“Until our demands are met, we are going to camp here at the maidan. Authorities, we hope you realise we come in peace, and shall allow us the right to have an open and peaceful dialog. We do not want any violence!”

The policemen scrambled. They had not planned for this huge a crowd, and they had certainly not planned for them camping at the Azad Maidan for days to come. This matter could play out over weeks - how would this crowd be managed, and how would the rest of the city's business go about ?

A senior policeman walked over to Jaidev and the other apparent leaders standing with him, such as Satya and Vishnu, to reason out with them.

“Look, let's not create a ruckus in the city. This is a discussion that needs to happen with the administration, we can take this to their offices and negotiate.”

Jaidev quickly retorted. “I'm sorry, this is a discussion that needs to happen in the open public, the Indian public deserves to know all the details. We aren't moving from here.”

The officer tried a few more times but the Samyukta Party members didn't budge. He soon walked away; he would now have to take this to the higher authorities.

The British, by 1945, were already struggling to rule over the vast Indian subcontinent. The Samyukta Party was now a major point of contention between them, and their authorities back in Britain. How do they get their citizens back? How do they ensure the safe return of not only Lord Hatting, but everyone else who has been kidnapped ?

They couldn't simply forego all taxation - it was a major source of revenue for their country and they needed it to fight their war. They couldn't also stop the enlisting of Indian soldiers in their army - they needed the men to fight on the frontline. The issue was becoming more challenging.

Bapu, Nehru, Khansaab - they all publicly requested the Samyukta Party members to not use "hostage-ism" as a means to get their demands.

Jaidev's reply was one that was heard all around the subcontinent and even the world - "We tried non-violence and dialog for over 50 years, look where that's gotten us!"

What was also happening with Jaidev's bold approach was that the common Indian was getting empowered as well. There were countless new stories from around the country as to how Indians had begun retorting back to the British, and servants not showing up to work, bodyguards not showing up on time, and regular passerby screaming at Britishers to "go back to their country!"

Some soldiers who were being enlisted to fight in the World War refused, and promised that if they were handed a gun they would aim it at the British first. Newspapers continued to print these stories and many others.

All this while, Jaidev and his comrades camped at Azad Maidan. Some new stories came of Indians attempting to kidnap Britishers just like Jaidev and his comrades had. Some men had succeeded, others had been arrested. It was as if the modus of self-rule had suddenly began in India.

"The crowd is only building around the Azad Maidan, and there are now smaller groups in Delhi, Calcutta, Madras and other cities rising up as well. They all demand the same thing - no taxes to be paid, and no soldiers to be enlisted. Well, where do we get the money to fight this war then!", spoke Lord Smithson, one of the senior bureaucrats of British India, amongst his peers.

"Already many Indians are engaging in open retort against many British across India. And the Monarchy is asking for the safe return of the hostages. We don't have much of an option, we need to do something. But we can't just give in to their demands !", added Major Buckley, a senior army officer.

"We need to think of something ingenious, really. And fast!"

Khansaab had a planned rally in Delhi, and thousands of his supporters had come to listen to him speak. Many of Khansaab's supporters also supported the Ekta movement, and they considered the Muslim League's and the Samyukta Party's missions not to converge.

And yet, Khansaab quite openly rejected the methods of Jaidev and his party. "These young men, they know not the ways of the world! Our soldiers fight in the British army and earn respect not only of the British but our own people and also of people all around the world. They get educated, they earn a decent living. We have paid taxes to the British government and they have built us schools, colleges, hospitals. But why doesn't anyone speak of that? This is why, we demand a nation just for us, a nation just for Muslims - where we will decide our future, and the way of life. We don't need such antisocial elements in our statehood - we will build the perfect state, Pakistan!"

Jaidev had to give a reply to Khansaab, and befitting one at that.

“Khansaab saab says that we should fight for the British, that we should pay taxes to the British. Whose side is he on? Ours or the British? Sure, the British built some schools and hospitals here, but should we hand over our lives to them for this? Should we go on dangerous war zones, fight and get killed, for a fight that isn't even ours? Khansaab saab, you are gravely mistaken. And you ask for a separate country.. our people have been fighting for decades over this demand, thousands of Hindus and Muslims have died in the process. Is this what your dream is ?”

Many Muslims, especially those who had lost their loved ones to war, or had been driven to poverty because of British rule, came to support Jaidev's cause. A separate religious homeland was a great dream, but an even greater dream was one of peace and prosperity.

The newspapers continued to print the debates, page by page, day by day, and readership was the highest it had ever been in the country. The crowd around the Azad Maidan was growing - but there was no sign of the British budging.

Jaidev had become a national name, and Sardar Patel, a leader of the highest stature, mentioned him on a positive note for the first time in the country.

“This young man, and his brothers, as he calls them, have shown immense courage and resolve to take this movement to the national state. He demands abolishment of taxes, to stop the enlisting of Indians to fight British wars, and peace. What is wrong in that?”, he wrote in a column at the Hindustan Times.

As Jaidev's support grew, the British were coming under immense pressure to give in to the demands. They were already under pressure to grant freedom to India, to give a separate state to Pakistan, and to leave the country - but this only exacerbated their dilemma. Yet, the World War 2 continued, and there was no respite in sight for them.

Khansaab continued to support the British calls for soldiers, saying that supporting the effort would lead to political freedoms as time would progress. But Jaidev's movement had dampened such efforts. People were for the first time seeing an alternate route, a route not led by “upper class” politicians such as Khansaab and Nehru, but rather one being presented by someone just as themselves.

British officials all attempted to negotiate with Jaidev at the maidan. But the Samyukta Party's demands were clear - no taxes, no soldiers, and a guarantee to be free from prosecution. The British attempted to send soldiers to arrest this crew - but the numbers were just too many, and it would lead to bloodshed all around. Besides, many of the Indian policemen and soldiers had begun supporting the Samyukta Party, and may not necessarily have fired their guns at them. For the first time, the British were weakened in firepower.

It was turning into a stalemate.

But the families of the kidnapped Britishers were anxious, and desperately wanted to see them return home safely. The mighty British empire was unable to protect them, and the kidnapers were freely camping and protesting at one of the main commercial centres of subcontinent India. All throughout Britain, which was already undergoing massive challenges such as night time air raids by the Germans, there were calls to accede to at least some of the demands.

On that warm April morning, the same young boy who had announced the arrival of the Samyukta Party at the maidan ran to Jaidev, carrying the morning newspaper.

“BRITAIN AGREES TO DEMANDS”

Jaidev couldn't believe it. Neither could the entire crowd that was present - and everyone read the newspaper with great intent. Britain had agreed to not accept any central levies for the following year, had agreed to not enlist any more Indians in the war than those who were already serving, and had given written assurance in the newspaper that Jaidev or anyone from the Samyukta Party shall not be prosecuted, in exchange for the freedom of the hostages.

While the demands were not exactly met - only central levies would not be collected, meaning state levies were still due, and new soldiers would not be enlisted, meaning existing soldiers would still fight for the British, it was a victory nonetheless. Jaidev and his close comrades had not accepted the British to give in to all their demands in full in the first place - but the fact that the British had budged was a great victory in itself.

Jaidev looked at the massive crowd around him. It had grown five fold to what it was when he had first arrived at the maidan. He picked up the megaphone.

“My brothers and sisters... what shall we do? Shall we release the hostages?”

There was a mixed reaction from the crowd. Some of them genuinely wanted more accession from the British.

“I know we want the British to leave our land, and I assure you they will - but this is a great first step. They are foregoing central levies, which means our brothers and sisters throughout India will, for the first time, not pay any overhead taxes. Further, no more soldiers will be enlisted in the British army from India - our brothers will not fight their war ! Those who have already been sent to the frontline, we will work to bring them back as soon as possible”, Jaidev said, speaking gloriously into the megaphone, as if it were one of his poems, those which he had performed with great pride all his life.

The crowd broke into a collective agreement as Jaidev spoke. They knew the British couldn't bring back all the soldiers from all around the world, and not agreeing to the currently given terms would result in waiting of even more weeks or even months.

“We agree!”, broke out the crowd in a loud roar.

There was a great celebration all throughout. Jaidev had become a national hero, one who was revered not only by his followers, but the general populace in itself - even many of the policemen and soldiers who were present at the maidan joined in the celebration, much to the embarrassment of the British officers who supervised them.

The hostages were released within two days of the mutual agreement.

Having been granted immunity from prosecution over the kidnappings, Jaidev and his comrades set up a political office in Bombay. They had received great support and donations from all over India, and they purchased a plot of land in Chembur. It was a large piece of land, over an acre in area, and they set up a minified fortress of sorts for themselves.

They knew that they would now have enemies from all over the country, and they had to stay protected. Their cause of driving the British was still alive, and the calls for division of the country into Hindu and Muslim regions was growing rapidly.

Khansaab was delivering speeches and rallies all throughout the country, and writing columns for Hindi, English and Urdu dailies regularly, to clamour for his cause. He greatly wanted a separate Muslim state, even though he himself was not an orthodox Muslim by any standards. He dressed in western attire, he married a non-muslim, and he spoke more English than Urdu. But he was close to the British, and this allowed him to raise his cause more freely.

Many leaders of the Indian National Congress rejected Khansaab's demands - but support from the British had empowered Khansaab and he was warring on all fronts to have a separate state for Muslims granted to him.

Jaidev could not imagine his glorious country, once the epitome of civilisation, being divided based on something as simple as religion, which merely translated into a belief in God. How and why you believed was up to you, but it was the belief that was important - and if a Hindu and

Muslim both believed in God, they should be able to co-exist. Political missions were no place for religious action, he believed.

But vested interests throughout the country through otherwise. The Muslim League was going all out, and because of their audacious approach to creation of a separate state, the Hindu Mahasabha also supported creation of “Two-Nations”, also known as the “Two-Nation-Theory”. Both religions, whose people had descended from the same lineage of ancestors, were warring with each other.

Jaidev, who now moved around with heavy security of his close comrades and followers, gave a speech in Dadar showing his displeasure over the religious division that was engulfing the country.

My fellow countrymen, amongst you are Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsis, Sikhs and maybe even more religions that I may not be fully aware of. Along with me on stage here are also Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsis and Sikhs. Our two most common languages, Hindi and Urdu, are almost interchangeable. If one was to learn Hindi, by default one would also be proficient in Urdu, and vice versa. Sure, the written script differs - but the spoken word is almost the same.

I have a Muslim brother here with me, his name is Rahman. We have been together since our early days in Calcutta. We have fought alongside each other, and seen many battles together. We have many more Muslim brothers, who have fought alongside with us for a cause of national unity, rather than national division.

And it has never been important to us whether one of us is a Hindu or a Muslim or a Parsi or any other religion. If we can sit, eat, sleep, fight and live together, why do we need to divide our glorious country into pieces, which will result not only in geographical division, but also result in mass bloodshed and violence, repercussions which will be felt for decades to come.

I have enjoyed Urdu ghazals and poetry since I have been a child, and Rahman and many other of our Muslim brothers and sisters have enjoyed Hindustani carnatic music.

The films that we watch - whether we are Hindu or Muslim, entertain us equally. Alam Ara and Devdas entertained us equally - did we ask anyone if we should be entertained by a certain movie or theatre play, based on our religion ?

Then why do we demand a separate country? What good will come of this? Why should we listen to politicians and their vested interests, interests that serve them and them only, to lose our families, land and livelihood and have our glorious country divided?

Mark my words - if this country is divided - there will be mass murders, loss of life and bloodshed - just as there was where Bengal was divided in 1905. Only this time, the bloodshed wont stop for years to come.

As Jaidev completed his speech, there was a deafening silence at the small town hall where he spoke. His words had moved everyone present - and indeed, there were people of all religions present.

“This Jaidev Singh is a real prick on the side”, spoke Khansaab, as he smoked his famed pipe. “And he’s got Muslims listening to him.”

Khansaab’s close aide, Wasim Khan, arranged some papers on his desk. “I don’t think we should worry. He doesn’t have the following of all the clerics and the sects across states.”

“But he’s got the people listening to him. That can be a problem”, Khansaab spoke, cool and calculated in his mannerisms as always.

Wasim Khan agreed.

“We need to increase our force and have the Two Nation theory signed into law. Then, nobody can stop Pakistan from being created.”, Khansaab added.

“I’ll see what I can put forth with the British. Meanwhile, let’s have our ground troops begin action on all fronts, especially in Sindh, Bengal and Punjab”, Wasim added.

“Yes - we need to move fast now, the British are already getting ready to leave. We can’t leave this task incomplete.”

Far away in Karachi, a scuffle broke out next morning. Some Hindus and Muslims had quarrelled over ownership of shops and a small crowd had gathered, with the argument soon taking a violent turn. Similar events began in other parts of the country, with dozens of cases of violence between Hindus and Muslims breaking out.

Jaidev and his associates decided to move fast. They knew their opponents had mobilised resources across the country to begin violence, so that the British could be pressurised to ensure the “Two Nations” rule was signed into law.

It would be totally unacceptable to them.

Jaidev instructed his team to activate all resources across the country to prevent bloodshed - but not to be afraid to use violence if the enemy too was using it. Local units of the Samyukta Party all throughout the country, in Delhi, Bombay, Lahore, Karachi, Rawalpindi, Calcutta, Madras, Indore, Poona, Amritsar, Jalandhar - everyone was activated and instructed to gather their respective teams.

Bengal, Sindh and Punjab were identified as hotspots for violence - and where the team numbers were low, people would be moved from different cities to collect strength.

Along with the mobilisation of resources, Jaidev decided that he would have to go across cities and hold public rallies, to gain momentum for his cause of the British leaving a unified India, and not one that was divided into multiple countries based on religion.

The task was monumental, considering his opposition had been existing for decades and he had only been a named figure for the past few years. But he was not going to allow his country to be divided, at any cost.

*“This land has existed,
Since years counting in thousands,
Since the time land was free,
And water was not taxed,
Since the time all men were an equal,
And all dreams were intact,*

*Now we are on a road
Where this land shall be split
The people shall be uprooted
And many shall be killed*

*Is this what we wanted
Or is this what they want
We must ask ourself
Are they our masters
Or shall we revolt?"*

Jaidev spoke each word with immense resolve, as if his life depended on it. He was giving a speech in front of a few thousand who had shown up in Amritsar, a city of Punjabis and Sikhs - and the crowd roared with him.

He went to Lucknow, Lahore, Karachi, Calcutta, Hyderabad, Madras, Delhi and Bombay, and spoke the same words everywhere.

*We must ask ourself
Are they our masters
Or shall we revolt?*

The words rang through open fields and closed town halls - and any one who had heard Jaidev speak was immensely moved by his words. Such was his growing power that even the mighty Indian National Congress praised him behind closed doors, and there was a section in the Congress that wanted him to join their party - but as the party was a very large behemoth, it was difficult for such decisions to be taken.

Jaidev was undaunted, nevertheless. He would travel from city to city, surrounded by his loyal brothers, comrades and associates, his only goal being to prevent the partition of India. His approach to life had always been of unity, and the same values resonated with all of his loyal associates and followers.

Khansaab, however, was just as resolute in the formation of Pakistan. The British had been weakened by the World War, and had lost a lot of the economic and military clout they held over the world once. It was the opportune time to pressurise them into dividing the country and leaving the land - a task they were happy to oblige in so as they got to leave relatively unscathed and with the riches they had looted for centuries.

Hundreds of tonnes of gold and silver and gemstones, along with currency lay in British banks, all of which had been derived from the Indian subcontinent. They were all too happy to just leave.

That's when Khansaab called for Direct Action Day - a day that was going to be a turning point in India's fight for freedom, when Khansaab asked all Muslims to openly reject British rule, and to join the cause with all their heart to derive a Muslim country out of the Indian subcontinent.

Khansaab asked all Muslims of India to suspend business on the 16th of August, and to unite for a separate Muslim country to be carved out of India. He announced the plan on the 29th of July, and gave the entire country roughly 2 weeks notice to prepare themselves - it was to be the largest movement of the sort in India.

The Muslim League mobilised all their statewide units and organised rallies all throughout the country. Behind the scenes, the British supported the cause - many British intellectuals knew that a united India was a more powerful India, and with the world just having come out of a World War, it was in the Western world's interest to leave as much of the world weakened as they could.

But Jaidev was determined enough, and he had hundreds of thousands of followers across the country.

Bapu, who spoke against violent mechanisms, openly supported Jaidev's cause of having a united India. So did much of the Indian National Congress, which pressed for the same goal.

“The most volatile areas on Direct Action Day would be Bengal and Punjab, where there are huge numbers of both religions”, Jaidev spoke to his close comrades, Satya and Rahman. Vishnu, Deshu and Bandho were tasked with activating as many people across the country to form non-violent, peaceful units that would protect loss of life and property. Already, there were too many instigators.

“We must ensure we have a thousand people in each district, in groups of 100, ready to protect and serve”, said Jaidev.

Khansaab, on the other hand, continued to stir emotions for his cause.

“We do not want war. But if you want war, we accept your offer unhesitatingly. We will either have a divided India, or a destroyed India. But not a United India”, spoke Khansaab, at a conference. He was unwilling to listen.

“We can’t have people dying and India being destroyed”, thought Jaidev.

As August 16 drew near, the Samyukta Party had enough people in most districts in Bengal, Punjab, Sindh and several big cities. Their party members held banners and slogans, saying “Believe in Peace”, “Hindu-Muslim Bhai Bhai”, “United India, Strong India”, “Religion doesn’t require war”, and so on.

Jaidev gave speeches at key cities leading up to Direct Action Day. He could sense emotions were riled up among Hindus and Muslims both - Hindus were generally opposed to the partition, but the claims of the Muslims for the separate country had stirred them up as well. He didn’t want either side to take any violent action, which had been the case decades prior when Bengal was partitioned in 1905, and at several instances during the course of history, especially in recent years.

He decided to go to Bengal, and stand with his comrades. Satya and Rahman were already there, working with local crews to have as much support as possible, when needed.

He walked through the streets of Calcutta, covered in disguise, through Khiderpore, Burra Bazaar and many other areas. He remembered his first days when Netaji had brought him here from Ranikhet.

As he and Rahman sat down for a cup of tea, a few locals kept staring.

“What is it, brother?”, Rahman asked.

The locals, a group of young men, looked on for a moment and then said, “Both of you look a little familiar. Are you from the University?”

Jaidev shook his head. “No, we’re travellers from Awadh.”

“Oh - have you ever been to Bombay? Because I was in Bombay last month, and I think I’d seen someone like you there”, said one of the locals.

Jaidev and Rahman shook their heads. It was clear their disguise wasn’t very good, but it was something they’d put on in short time.

It was clear to them now that they were quite well known throughout the country, however.

On August 15, 1946, the eve of the Direct Action Day, there was an eerie calm on the streets of India. Khansaab had given orders to all his units to ensure that their voices were heard - that they would have nothing less than a separate country for themselves. Thakur had instructed his people to prevent any traction that the rallies may get, and to ensure that their movement would be

limited in area. One group wanted to cover as much ground as possible, another wanted to prevent it.

Jaidev awaited eagerly that night. Nobody could predict what the next day would entail.

As dawn broke, hustle and bustle could be heard around the city. One could hear footsteps and clatter, and the movement of groups of people. Jaidev, Rahman, Vishnu, Satya and the others were on Park Street with their supporters. They had gathered over a 1000 people from different parts of the country and broke up into groups of 50, going into different parts of the city.

The Muslim League had demanded that no business be conducted on Direct Action Day, that all shops be closed, that a full fledged hartal was to take place. Hindu hardline groups rejected this demand, with the notion that if the entire country was put on strike, the demand for a separate country would be legitimised.

Jaidev's men had created a network of security layers, and as they'd broken up into groups of 50, they'd divided themselves as relays and messengers. Some of the personnel stood on key roads, keeping a lookout for any potential attackers, rioters and mobs, and their main goal was to ensure that the day went by peacefully.

By 8 AM, crowds had already gathered at many areas.

One of the groups of the Samyukta Party was at Lalbazar, when they noticed a small scuffle ensuing around some of the shops.

"Hey ! What are you doing - keep it peaceful.", said Naresh, a member of the Samyukta Party. He had about 10 men with him.

It became apparent that a few shop owners had broken out into a quarrel, as some were Hindus while others were Muslim. The Muslim shopkeepers had closed their shops due to the issuance of Action Day, but the Hindus had decided to keep their shops open. After all, a day of closed shops meant loss of a day's earnings. It wasn't immediately clear as to who started the quarrels, but by the time Naresh and his team got there it was on the verge of breaking out into a brawl.

"We need all the shops closed in the area !", said one of the Muslims.

"If you close your shop nobody will come to mine - I sell sweets and you cook biryani - who will come to eat sweets if the restaurants itself are closed?", said one of the Hindus.

"I don't care - today, all Muslims must keep their shops closed."

"I am telling you my helpers will run your shop, why don't you go to the rallies and conduct your activities, but please, keep the market open, I have two old parents and young children to feed!"

"What's your name, sir?", asked Naresh.

"I'm Sundar and this is Salim", said the Hindu.

"Well, if Salim wants to close his shop then there's nothing we can do.", said Naresh.

"Well in that case I must ask him and the others to not rally here, so that people may come and buy goods. At least those who have kept their shops open may conduct business!"

Naresh looked at Salim. "Sir, we are from the Samyukta Party. We agree, that you may wish to close your shop. We don't deny that at all. But please, let the others conduct their business. How long have you known Sundar ?"

Salim, wearing his signature hat and donning a beard, looked at Sundar. "I've known him for 20 years."

“And have you been friends?”

“We have. We eat meals together so many times.”

“Well then - why are you ruining a 20 year friendship over one day of protests?”

Salim shrugged. “I don’t want to ruin a friendship. But I will not open my shop today.”

“Don’t open your shop then, but let others come here and buy from us at least!”

Salim nodded. “Alright. We’ll go to College Street and join the groups there. See Sundar - I’m doing this only for you!”

“Thank you Salim. But this is my last thank you to you. If the country is divided up then you will go to Pakistan, in any ways we wont remain friends. So thank you, and good bye.”

Salim thought for a moment. Sundar was making sense.

“I’ll come back in the evening and see you - if I’m going to Pakistan I’m taking you with me.”

Naresh smiled, the situation had been defused. He hoped other areas in the country would also see such peace - although it was a difficult ask.

As the day proceeded, however, the story in other areas of the city was not as peaceful.

Mobs had clashed at Harrison Road, and about 50 men from each side, Hindus and Muslims, had engaged in violence. Shops were torn apart and looted, several people from each side had been attacked. By the time members of the Samyukta Party had reached, there were several dead bodies on the street.

At Burrabazar, the violence broke out right in front of a team of Samyukta Party members. Two mobs rushed in from either side of the market, each with about a 100 men carrying swords, sticks, bottles and stones. Bricks were hurled from a distance - and the mobs knew there were Samyukta Party men around the area, and they were one of the first to be attacked as the violence grew.

The party members tried their best to prevent the violence - but there was no way the mob was listening to any words.

That’s when Pratap and Shamshad, two of the team leaders with this particular unit, retrieved the pistols they had been given by the party, and fired shots into the air.

Where words fail, show force, they had been instructed by Jaidev.

The gunshots caught the attention of the mobs. They didn’t have any guns - they had just sticks and some swords.

The violence stopped for a moment as the mobs looked up at the roof from where the shots were fired. One of the eager mobsters, with a brick in his hand threw it towards the roof. Shamshad fired a bullet just a few steps away from his feet.

The mob grew quiet.

“Stop this violence. This is meant to be a peaceful protest, isn’t it!”, said Pratap.

A few more of the party members emerged on nearby roofs, all showing their guns.

“Any more violence and you will be shot on your legs. We don’t wish to harm you. We only wish to bring peace - our goal isn’t violence”.

The mob slowly backed off and dispersed.

News of the Samyukta Party's heroics in mob infested areas soon spread - and mobs were now more worried about encountered armed party members ready to fire guns when they came in with sticks and stones.

"This is the beauty of mobs - they'll conduct rampage if they feel there is no chance of retaliation - but show them some resistance and they step back", said Jaidev.

Small rallies were being held across the city, and Jaidev with his 500 or so followers, camped near Calcutta University and decided to hold a speech of his own - his men could not be everywhere to stop the violence but he must ensure that their ideology is not lost.

A makeshift stage was set up for him, and a crowd had already formed around him. His group of followers include all religions, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and even Parsis and Christians. He ensured that a representative of each religion was visible on stage. And then he gave the speech that would alter the course of his life and the destiny of the country forever.

My dear countrymen and women.

Today, you have decided to stand in protest on demand for a separate country for Muslims. These demands have led to rejection from Congress and other politicians, and they are now standing in opposition. You have closed down the entire country, shops have been shuttered, businesses have been closed.

Already, there are reports of violence coming through. Hindus and Muslims, those who have known each other for decades, and fighting against one another. Our teams of the Samyukta Party are trying best to prevent violence and bloodshed, to see that the only way to progress is via economic processes, and not religion. But vested interests continue to push their agenda. Hardline Hindu and Muslim newspapers print rhetoric against one another. Weapons are found among both Hindu and Muslim groups, ready to go to war with one another.

Tell me, if people die for this cause, what is the use of a separate country - will the dead be able to migrate to their promised land?

The leaders who pull the strings, the ones who demand these divisions and partitions, they are sitting comfortably in the luxuries of their bungalows and large homes. You all are here, under the sun, not knowing when violence may break out and someone may lose their life, or lose an eye, or lose a limb.

What is the use of this protest then?

Why not spend this time learning a skill, doing a service, reading, writing, or anything that is progressive?

I ask you again, do you wish to engage in violence where both Hindus and Muslims will be negatively impacted, or do you wish to engage in prosperity, in working together, so that we can all grow together ?

Just as Jaidev finished his sentence, gunshots were heard from within the crowd. A bullet hit Jaidev - he was shot - and he fell to the ground. His close comrades covered him, and the crowd broke into a frenzy. The shooter was caught by the crowd and beaten and battered. Satya rushed in and stopped the mob from killing the shooter - they needed him alive to know who had conducted this act.

Jaidev was rushed to the hospital - he'd been shot in the chest, but he had been conscious all along the way from the University grounds to the medic ward. Luckily, the hospital was not too far away from where they were.

The attack on Jaidev became national news, and made him even more of a hero than he already was. The Samyukta Party was already being celebrated across the country for preventing riots and bloodshed, and the attack on Jaidev further created a legend in the minds of the people.

Huge crowds gathered outside the hospital where Jaidev was being treated.

All throughout the country, stories started emerging how the Samyukta Party had helped both Hindus and Muslims during the riots, and that there had been instances where a Muslim from the Samyukta Party had helped a Hindu, and vice versa.

There was no differentiation in the minds of the Samyukta Party - and newspapers, the All India Radio, newscasters, magazines, all wrote about how the party promoted unity in times of distress - not just in Calcutta but all throughout the country. It was difficult to contain the emotions that were felt for Jaidev and his party during this time.

And Jaidev himself, having been shot, was undergoing intensive care. The bullet had pierced his chest and had hit his lung - he was alive but he was critically injured, and his life could go both ways from here. The entire country prayed for him.

Khansaab, Panditji, Bapu, everyone expressed concern over Jaidev's health. It was the first time all major political parties had agreed on a matter, apart from the cause of deriving freedom from the British.

"I remember the young man, I've seen him since he was a child and he recited his brilliant poetry on my visit to Ranikhet. How could one forget such a personality?", said Bapu, in one of his interviews.

Panditji and Khansaab were equal in praise, and the preceding riots had dampened their thoughts of a divided India - was it really necessary that such violence and bloodshed be experienced as a nation? What happened in Bengal was only a preview of things to come, and if the partition succeeded, there would be more chaos and bloodshed in the country.

Yet, Khansaab continued to press on for a separate nation - "We demand Pakistan because without our own country, we increasingly risk becoming marginalised and targeted in a Hindu dominated land. That is unacceptable to us."

At the hospital, doctors continuously monitored Jaidev's health. He was still unconscious, put under a heavy dose of painkillers, morphine and a ventilator. Outside the hospital, large crowds awaited Jaidev and prayed for him.

And then, much past midnight, around the hour when most souls are fast asleep, Nurse Devki, who was assigned night duty, heard some footsteps from Jaidev's ward. She heard some movement, and heard a glass breaking.

She rushed in and saw Jaidev, his full six foot frame, standing tall, having a glass of water.

He looked at the nurse as he finished his glass.

"Can you get me another glass of water, please. I'm thirsty."

The hero of many had awakened.

It would take a few more days before Jaidev finally made his public appearance, but the people awaited him with open arms. It was almost a certainty that the British were leaving and talks of

the partition had quietened down, especially because of the Samyukta Party's efforts. Most people believed in the Ekta mission rather than religious differences.

Economic progress was the goal. But the British continued to have other plans.

It was at a closed door meeting where the British decided that the partition would be conducted, and they would make it their one final goal before they fully ceded this land. They decided that India on its own was too big a country, with a chance to be too powerful, too important. The only way to ensure a transfer of power and yet maintain world order would be to break up this country, into smaller pieces.

"We need to break this country up before we leave. I know the riots of the past few months have dampened the resolve of some of the leaders wishing for partition, but these next few months need us to be firm in our resolve.", said Lord Houndhatten, the viceroy of India.

"We need to ensure the princely states agree to our proposal of partition. Make sure you give them everything you can offer them, in terms of power post Independence."

"A lot of the princely states support the Samyukta Party - in fact we believe a lot of the arms that were used during these riots by the party were given by the royals themselves.", added Major Desmond.

"I know. But we have explicit orders from England, that the partition must occur no matter what. We have to leave India weaker than what it already is. A country that's the size of the continent is going to be immensely powerful 50 years from today.. remember that.", said Houndhatten.

"I agree sir. I'll speak to all the royals and get them onboard."

"Good. Keep me updated."

The day Jaidev was discharged from the hospital, a massive crowd awaited him. There may have been over 10000 people of all religions and societal strata in the crowd. He was still bandaged across his right shoulder, but he raised his left arm in the air, making a fist.

"Long live India ! Jai Bharat ! Long live India ! Jai Bharat !", he screamed, as he was escorted by his security through the hospital grounds and onto his car. The crowd screamed with him. It took 20 minutes to cover a walk of just a few meters - everybody wanted to catch a glimpse and show love to their leader.

Satya and Rahman were already in the car, and Vishnu and Bandho were in another one following them. Jaidev wanted to get onto business right away.

"The job is not done yet. The people may have quietened their demands for partition but the British are still here, the job isn't done until they leave in full and transfer all power to the Government of India."

"Yes - I spoke to a few princes - from Indore, Jaipur and Hyderabad - the British have been reaching out with detailed plans of partition to them. They are saying that Punjab and Bengal will go in their entirety to Pakistan, considering the high number of Muslims there", said Satya.

Jaidev was slightly surprised. "In their entirety? Even for the British, that is somewhat overdone, isn't it?"

"Well that's what they are saying", he replied.

"I guess they want to leave India, or whatever remains of it, as weak as possible. Without Punjab we lose the crops and without Bengal we lose the Bay. Intelligent moves by the British, I guess", Jaidev said.

The car drove through the streets of Calcutta, many of the shops still closed and a lot of property still destroyed. Newspaper estimates put that had the violence continued for more than 5000 would have been killed. The Samyukta Party's efforts in curbing violence played a key role, and while millions worth of property was destroyed, the loss of life was limited to less than 500. A huge number, but it could have been much worse.

Jaidev had been offered to stay at the home of Biswajit Guha, a prominent Calcutta businessman who supported the Samyukta Party openly and fervently believed in its cause. Guha had a palatial home in North Calcutta, with over 40 rooms and a range of servants and guards. He would be well taken care of and could recover with ease here.

But more importantly, Jaidev could utilise part of the home as a makeshift office, until he was strong enough to return to Bombay. He reached the gates of Guha Mansion, where Rajagopal, the veteran Indian Express journalist was already waiting.

"Welcome back, Jaidev!", Raja quipped, and gave Jaidev a light hug. "We missed you."

Jaidev smiled. Guha was present with several of his associates and helpers.

"Thank you Jaidev, for staying at my home. You will get all that you need here. Rest and recover well. I've set up an office for you here, please come, let me show it to you."

Guha led Jaidev and everyone else to a fairly large room behind the main house, one with its own entry gates and small caretaker quarters. The room had been set up with two desks, a sofa, several chairs, a typewriter and some notepads and books. One could start working immediately here. Jaidev was pleased.

"Thank you, Guha sahib, for this gesture. We shall be forever indebted. I plan to begin working right away, which is why I've asked Raja bhai to be here", said Jaidev.

"Well, don't you want to get some rest?", Guha asked.

"No, I've been resting for a few weeks now. I need to get back to work."

"As you say. Well, I won't be of any hindrance to you. Please let me know if there is anything you need. And thank you, once again, on behalf of the country", Guha said, as he left the makeshift office.

Jaidev turned to Rajagopal.

"My brother. We have a lot of work to do. Do you know the British already have a plan in place for the partition of India?"

Rajagopal nodded. "Yes, of course - they've been reaching out to all the royal families. I've heard that they plan to leave India within the next 12 months."

"I believe it'll be sooner than that. So, let's discuss our plan of action. How many newspapers can you get into writing for us across India?"

"Well, I have a network of over a 100 dailies that would easily publish anything we decide".

"Fantastic. We need independent writers, intellectuals, professors, to publish daily articles over the next several weeks as to why India does not demand a partition."

"I see."

"I could certainly go about writing my own pieces, but we need to make the movement stronger. I've been following the papers - the opposition has been using many of their cronies to write

pieces about why partition is necessary - we need to make our movement just as strong. Much beyond just the Samyukta Party. Can you activate some of your contacts?"

"Ofcourse. I'll write to all of them today itself."

"Great. We need as much public discourse about prevention of the partition of India. And here, I wrote this piece at the hospital - its called *The Future of India in my eyes*. Take a look."

Jaidev handed over a handwritten piece to Rajagopal.

In the past few weeks, I have seen life flash before my eyes. As the bullet pierced my chest, I felt a great sense of anguish, that if I were to leave this world, I would be leaving behind a task undone, leaving behind my great country in a situation where it's future was unknown, where what could have been great may be left unaccomplished.

I wanted to stand up and fight, as the pain engulfed my body on that stage, but I was unable to do so. The human body is limited by itself, was one of my last realisations as I lost consciousness.

The same fate cannot be granted to this great land of ours, where civilisation was born and numerous great, learned thinkers, writers, leaders, artists and intellectuals have given gifts to the world.

If our country's fate is limited by itself, we will be a land of only potential. But my dream is to see this land revive it's glory, to again be a shining light of the world, and to grow out of it's colonial suppression and empower not only it's people but the people of other countries and continents.

For that, this country must not be oppressed any further by vested interests such as partition of land and emptying of government coffers for any activities other than economic growth. The first few years after India's independence are essential to build a strong foundation, one that will be hampered by the division of land where not necessary.

We are now in the 20th century, and as the Industrial Revolution has shown us, religion is not the basis for prosperity of a people. For example, the Samyukta Party, today a strong party throughout the country, with over a 100,000 active members, does not require enlisting of one's religion.

In all my life, I have had friends who have been Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Parsis, Buddhists and many other religions. Every human being, in essence, demands the same thing from life - peace, prosperity and stability. Religion can support in achieving these goals, but it is in no way the means to an end. Especially if one believes their religion is superior to another.

And that is why, the people of India must today work together, to build this country, instead of working against each other. This is a land where all religions have co-existed for thousands of years. As we enter the modern age, we cannot be conducting primitive activities such as dividing land and resources based on religion.

We are strongly opposed to the partition of the country, because it will lead not only to major economic loss, but also to the loss of lives. The riots in Bengal have been dangerously prescient of what the future may hold, if we proceed with partition of this land.

We must focus our energies to the empowerment of our people, and to economic prosperity. More than 70% of our people live in abject poverty. Do we wish to subject them to even more tortures of daily life, or to strengthen them, so that everyone in this country, at a bare minimum, does not lack basic food and amenities?

I ask the people of India what they would like to choose - peace, prosperity and progress, or violence, loss and grief ?

The coming few months shall decide. We shall use all of our powers to prevent the partition and to bring peace in India.

Jai Bharat !

Jaidev's letter to the people of the country was printed all across India, in newspapers across dozens of languages. It was an announcement to the British and to all vested powers and leaders of the country who wished for partition and religious divide.

For all the support that Jaidev had received from across the country, the British were still in power, and mainstream political leaders still held considerable clout. Panditji, Khansaab, Thakur, they all knew that the British were leaving India soon, and everyone wanted power which they had strived for so long to attain.

"Partition of India is inevitable, for without partition, this country would cease to be a country when we, the British, leave - it would be just a vast array of land with no rule. But with partition, borders become official, singular governance becomes accepted", said Lord Houndhatten, in a closed door meeting with senior British officials and Indian leaders.

"We demand Punjab and Bengal in it's entirety, sir", said Khansaab, eager to put his demands first.

"There is no way you can have them both. We can offer you the far away lands of Balochistan, if you so wish", Panditji argued.

"It doesn't matter what you offer me, sir, what matters is what the people would be willing to accept", Khansaab retorted.

"Well, we know you all would not stop fighting over all these important pieces of land - so we're going to make the decisions easy for you", said Houndhatten.

"There's no way we're giving Punjab and Bengal", Panditji asserted.

"Yes, yes, of course. We're going to do this entire exercise as mathematical as possible. There is no scope for emotion, no scope for either yours or Khansaab's feelings. Thereby, we'd like to introduce Lord Davison, who's going to overlook the division of the land, and the borders that are going to be created."

One of the men, dressed in a crisp black suit, seated quietly at the end of the table stood up. This was Lord Jeffrey Davison - a former lawyer, who'd spent most of his life in England, and had never once ventured outside Europe. His trip to India was the furthest he'd ever been away from home.

"Lord Davison is a completely neutral party to all of your demands. He knows nothing of India, it's people, and it's very many charms - his decisions on the drawing of the borders are to be final. He will, of course, provide due justification for his decisions", said Houndhatten, in a pleasant, assured tone.

Davison looked at each of the men in the room. He was a tall, lean, almost lanky man, clean shaven and a receding hairline. He may have been in his 50s. "Thank you for the trust you have shown in me, my friends. I promise to all of you, that my ways of working and my decisions shall be fair and just. The people of this vast country deserve their own peaceful land, where they can practice their beliefs and religion without fear of persecution - and I shall do my best to give them that."

On June 3rd, 1947, all newspapers in India carried a singular headline:

Independence Announced

And yet, what was supposed to be a great rejoice for the entire country, had turned sour, as the same headline also announced that the partition was also officially going to take place - and sovereign India and Pakistan would be born, once the British would leave on the 15th of August, 1947.

Two nations born from one - India and Pakistan to be granted Independence

Jaidev read the news and threw the paper in angst.

FORCED INTO HIDING

“Who are they to decide whether this country will be divided or not?”, roared Jaidev, taking the stage at central Bombay. A large crowd of textile mill workers had gathered, some of them his old friends and colleagues from his days working at the mill.

“We need you to unite with us, to form a strong front - we have with us here people of all religions - tell us, do you wish to see this country divided?”, Jaidev questioned the crowd.

“No!”, was a resolute, loud response.

“I tell the authorities the same thing. They may have the guns, and the soldiers, and the weapons - but we will not allow useless division of this country to take place!”

“We refuse to accept this one sided decision on partition!”, he added.

“We instruct the people of this county, do not migrate, if you are a Hindu and you live West of Punjab, stay where you are - if you are a Muslim and you stay East of Bengal, stay where you are!”

“We will force this hollow, fake government to take back their decision on partition! Nobody shall migrate!”

And the crowd roared with him.

Suddenly, there was a small commotion at the back of the ground where Jaidev was speaking. A few dozen policemen and soldiers had appeared - they pushed and shoved through the crowd, moving towards Jaidev. As they got within 20 feet of the stage, Jaidev’s inner bodyguards formed a human wall, preventing the policemen from getting through.

“We have orders for the arrest of Jaidev Singh. Move aside!”, the head of the group of policemen, Officer Stevens, spoke.

Jaidev’s bodyguards didn’t move.

“On what grounds do you wish to arrest me, officer?”, Jaidev asked from the stage.

“On the grounds of breaking the peace, creating disharmony and not following the rule of law of this land!”, retorted Stevens.

“Am I breaking the peace and creating disharmony?”, Jaidev asked the audience.

“No!”, was another resolute reply.

“Move aside!”, the officer ordered the bodyguards once more.

“Dear officer, you too know that your days are numbered in this country. This crowd here, and thousands of others across the country, support our ways of peace. We do not wish violence, or disharmony. Please leave, lest things get disorderly here!”, Jaidev said.

“I have orders from the courts of India!”

“These are the courts of India, officer”, Jaidev replied, pointing towards the crowds.

“Do you wish to see me arrested?”, Jaidev asked the crowd once again.

By now, the crowd had gotten slightly agitated, and young men amongst the crowd had began moving towards the policemen who had arrived.

“Hey officers, better leave from here before we make you!”, one young man from the crowd mentioned.

“Stand back, or I will have you arrested under obstruction of justice!”, Officer Stevens said.

The young man did not take to the officer’s tone.

“You are here in my country, officer - I suggest you leave before it gets worse for you!”

Some of the Indian constables who had come with the officer began to reason with the crowd.

“Look, we are here only for Jaidev - try to understand!”, one of them said.

“You are an Indian, are you not? And you wish to arrest the one person who is trying to save this country? Whose side are you on?”, said another man from the crowd.

Jaidev added - “Everyone, please calm down!”

But Officer Stevens was in no mood to listen. He took a step forward, and decided to push through the bodyguards who prevented the police force from moving to the stage. The moment he pushed one of the guards, the guards reacted with equal force - and it sent Stevens falling to the ground. The constables with Stevens immediately moved towards the guards, and their rapid movement drew an agitated response from the crowd.

In a few seconds, pandemonium broke loose. The police, crowd and the bodyguards scoured into physical violence. Jaidev’s closest guards immediately covered for him and they rushed out from behind the stage, pushing through the crowd that was now fighting with the policemen. It was soon turning into a stampede, with the two dozen or so policemen greatly outnumbered by the crowd.

Jaidev, Satya and his closest aides escaped the grounds. They ran through the roads and gulleys to make a quick escape to a distance away from the ruckus. They ran for almost 15-20 minutes. For a moment, they were taken back to their early days, running from the police through the narrow lanes of Calcutta.

They couldn’t return to their compound in Dadar, knowing that the police would be waiting for them there. Traversing on foot, they decided to go to a safe house they had kept for exactly a day such as this. No one but the closest members of the Samyukta Party knew of this house, located in a Bandra back alley.

Jaidev and Satya reached the small house, and locals looked at them with curiosity. Some of them may have recognised Jaidev, but they couldn’t be too sure - Jaidev and Satya walked coolly past everyone. They entered the gates to the house, where their key was kept hidden behind some flower pots and inconspicuous items.

They stayed in the safe house for a few hours, changed their clothes, and as night fell, stepped out, walking away through the alleys to another unknown destination.

HIDING IN PALGHAR

All across the country, there was confusion. People did not know what was to be their next state of action - administrative officials daily took rounds of all districts in the city, and continually notified Hindus in West Punjab, and Muslims in West Bengal, to move in the opposite directions.

Bengal and Punjab were the two most affected, since the borders ran midway through their two states. Sindh in Pakistan, which had a huge non-Muslim community, was innately affected as well. And yet, for the first few days, nobody really knew what to do - how were they to simply uproot their entire lives and move to a completely unknown life? Where would they go? How would they survive.

And the Samyukta Party was conducting small rallies all across the country, to not accept the orders, and to stay put. The violence that broke out during Jaidev's rally was an ignition point for the non-partition movement.

After Jaidev and Satya escaped from the Bandra safe house, they took a late night goods train from the Bandra station, and reached Palghar, where they had a close contact named Dayanand Bhau. He was a local strongman, well connected, and well aligned with the Samyukta Party. Daya himself was a large man, and even next to Jaidev's six-foot, well built frame, Daya stood taller and broader, with a formidable wrestling background.

"Dayabhau, we have only 9 weeks to prevent an irreparable loss to this country. All our units across the country are fully stretched. We need to think of a strategy.", said Jaidev.

"Yes - the British have deployed all their officers and soldiers and have started telling people to migrate. In some cases people are being forced to pack whatever they can overnight and being put on trains", Daya said.

It was true - some of the migrations were forced indeed. "Punjab and Bengal are going to bear the brunt of it", added Satya.

"True - if we can stop the migrations in these two states, we should be able to force people elsewhere in the country to stop as well", Jaidev noted.

"But we probably have only 10000 active, ready to fight members across these two states. And the populations of the two states is around 100 million, combined."

The three shrugged. It was to be a monumental task.

"Shall we just kidnap Houndhatten?", said Satya, sarcastically. The three shared a light moment.

Jaidev looked at his two comrades. "Well, I think I have an idea."

BAPU AND PANDITJI'S HOUSE ARREST

By mid-June 1947, summer was in full effect, and Bapu had been living at Khedia House in Delhi for the past several months. After the violence that had broken out in Bombay over Jaidev's speech, Bapu had given several statements promoting non-violence, and that physical confrontations would only lead to loss of life and exacerbate the problems of the country - not solve them.

The Khedia House was a large mansion owned by one of the richest families of India. The Khedias ran large factories, mills and trading houses and since they had always been well connected politically, they had offered Bapu the mansion to live and conduct his activities at.

It was that warm summer morning in Delhi, as Bapu took a stroll on the vast lawns of the mansion, that he heard a commotion from a distant direction outside the premises. The chatter grew louder, and Bapu wondered what had come about. The mansion itself was heavily protected

by policemen and private security, but the noise from outside was loud enough that it seemed at least a hundred people were approaching.

Panditji was staying with Bapu at the time, and he rushed from inside the mansion and towards Bapu, along with a few aides.

“It’s the Samyukta Party members! They are marching towards the mansion!”, Panditji said.

“What do they want?”, Bapu asked.

The noise from outside grew louder. They could now hear the loud screams of the party members.

“We refuse partition! No to Partition! Deny Partition!”, the members could be heard screaming.

Bapu looked at Panditji. “They are here speaking Jaidev’s words.”

And then, the crowd screamed something they had not expected.

“Help us Bapu! Help us Panditji! No to partition!”

Bapu understood it was a ploy to get him to take stand with the Samyukta Party. Throughout the partition talks, Bapu, Panditji, Khansaab, had all taken a soft stance against each other, with the British controlling many behind the scenes activities - While Bapu brought conducted almost a month full of talks with Khansaab, to reason out why partition was going to harm the country, those talks remained just that - talks. Panditji and the All India Party opposed partition in public speeches, but never took a forceful stand against it; relegating it to mainly an opinion of the party, but never strong enough to cause any opposing waves.

Soon enough, it was as if the crowd had stopped right outside the gate of the Khedia mansion, and could continuously be heard screaming. Their roars almost shook the ground.

“Deny Partition! Deny Partition! Long live Bharat! Jai Bharat! Help us Bapu! Help us Panditji!”, were the screams that were continuously heard.

Outside, the police stopped the crowd from marching any closer than 50 feet from the gates. “Move no further!”, they ordered the crowd. One of the agitators replied, “We’ve come in peace. We only want our voices heard ! Jai Bharat !”

The policemen, aware of how things could easily escalate as they had in Bombay, took utmost care to not incite the crowd. “Okay, okay ! Please, just don’t move any further from here, that’s all!”

The crowd seemed to agree. The screams got even louder as the day progressed.

Similar events had unfolded outside the house of Khansaab, where a crowd just as large as the one in Delhi had set up camp. Khansaab had a huge mansion on a quiet hilltop in Bombay, but the entire street was filled with supporters of the Samyukta Party.

“Deny Partition! Freedom to India! Jai Bharat!”, were the loud screams that were heard all throughout. “Help us Khansaab! Deny the partition!”

All the members standing outside the abodes of the senior, stalwart leaders had been sent by the Samyukta Party - and the numbers were more than a hundred at each location.

Newspaper and Radio reporters were soon present on site, and the protest would gain national attention the next day.

BREAKING THE TRACKS

The initial response had pleased Jaidev and all his close comrades with the party. Satya and Daya were there with him, but Vishnu, who was working with units in Bengal, Rahman, who was in Bombay leading the protest at Khansaab's residence, Desho and Bandhu, who were in Delhi at Babu's abode, everyone was pleased with the pouring of support from the people of India.

On the second day, dozens of protestors had joined the ones in Delhi and Bombay, and many of the new supporters were not party members. They were just simple citizens with ordinary lives.

As the partition promised a new country to Khansaab, and leadership of Governance of India to Panditji, they both had, in many ways resigned to the order that partition was the only way to go. But the major differences between Hindus and Muslims had been created by the British over a span of many decades, and it wasn't necessarily the will of the people.

The Samyukta Party gave people hope that they too could follow their own chosen steps, and not simply be directed by external forces.

"Once again, we have visibility across India", Jaidev told Daya and Satya. "We have only about 8 weeks. We need to make sure the officers and administrators in charge of the partition fail. If the administration fails, there is no way the people will migrate."

"As per the note we received from Amritsar and Lahore, in some places the administration is inciting the majority religion in areas to violently act against the minorities, especially where the number is heavily skewed on one side", Satya said.

Inciting of riots was a common way the British controlled the people of India. "So they are going to play the divide and rule card one final time", Daya replied.

Jaidev was quick to think of a plan. "Let's create a list of districts where violence is most likely to break out and place our armed units there. If violence is foreseen anywhere, we must stop it immediately. Let's not have the people fight among themselves."

The three agreed. Daya brought out a map of India from his study, along with a stack full of documents, books and knowledge material gathered over months, it seemed.

"Let's mark down the areas, and plan out how we can best get our people amidst the chaos within a week. If we can't halt the people within this one week, it would be too late. Many would have already moved and others would follow suit.", Jaidev said.

They began to draw out some areas, and linking them with the population data Daya had gathered from various sources. The new map of India, as per the British had been published in a newspaper just a few days ago, so this was going to be handy for their preparations.

"The border areas are most prone to migration as they are in close proximity to both countries. Lahore and Amritsar are particularly vulnerable.", Satya said. The other two nodded. "But it's the areas that are at some distance from each other where chaos is most likely to ensue", he added.

"In Bengal, the population is so evenly divided that mass migration would ensue from both sides." Jaidev's eyes lit up. Satya had again given him a great idea.

It was the trains. It had to be the trains. Britain's one gift to India was going to be its most valuable opposition. If the trains were blocked, if the tracks couldn't run, if the people couldn't board the trains, they couldn't move.

Many poor were being forced to walk on foot to cross the borders, especially in near lying areas to the border, such as Rajasthan, but those people could be stopped. Common roads could be identified and people could be sent back.

But the trains, if they couldn't move, mass migration couldn't take place.

Jaidev and his comrades drew out a list of all the most used, populous stations, and created a plan of action. They created small teams led by their most able men, and in the evening, they turned on their morse code radio to broadcast the plan to the teams. The morse key made it's signature sound as Daya tapped the codes into the radio airwaves.

It was, after all, mandatory for all key party members to be active on the radio between 7 to 7.15 PM. There were 40 such leaders during tonight's broadcast - and each had ready teams of over 50 men. It may, or may not be enough, but as they had always done, they were going to give it their all.

The message that evening was simple and clear - "*STOP THE TRAINS.*"

Jaidev and the Samyukta Party had always been clear that if dialog and non-violence don't present solutions, force must be applied. And this time, the effort had to be hugely collaborative.

Parag Yadav, Shambhu Joshi, Kishore Nanda, Ismail Kader, Yaduvendra Rao; these were some of the key leaders who had received the instructions, and they acted immediately.

A goods train was to leave Delhi Railway Station at 5 AM the next morning, en route to Lahore, which was going to be a part of Pakistan in 2 months, if the British had their will. Just as the train was about to leave, a small crowd of 10 or so men rushed to the station, screaming at the top of their lungs.

"THE TRACKS ARE BROKEN AHEAD!"

The station master, the driver of the train and the people were immediately alerted. "Where are the tracks broken?", asked the station master, anxious. One of the men replied, "Just about 200 meters from here. All the tracks leading to the station have been broken away."

"Show me!"

And a large group of men rushed towards the spot where the tracks were sabotaged - indeed, all the tracks had been broken away. The police was called, and all trains to and from the Delhi Station were stopped. About 500 meters from where the tracks were broken, a large blockade of wooden posts was kept on each track, with a very visible sign stuck on top of it - "ALERT - STOP TRAIN - TRACKS BROKEN".

The police, railway officials, administration and even soldiers now had a complex task at hand. No trains could move to and from Delhi station, which was the centre of all rail activity of Northern India. Dozens of trains were stopped from moving towards the station. The tracks were broken in such a way that the entire girders were removed - it would take days for repairs.

The officials were busy inspecting the overall damage, when a young messenger boy ran towards them.

"Saab! I have a message from the police station - they are saying that all the tracks nearby to Howrah Station, Lahore Station, Karachi Junction, Faisalabad, Rawalpindi - all the tracks have been broken there as well!"

"What?", the station master exclaimed.

"Yes sir! Please reach the police headquarters immediately - they are calling for you there!"

The station master rushed off - the problem was one of a national level, and of much bigger scale than he had perceived.

All the major train stations of India had been disrupted. The British Officials were in doldrums, unable to foresee this action.

"This is again a job of the Samyukta Party. I tell you, if only we had finished them off in Calcutta 10 years ago...", Lord Houndhatten told his key advisors.

"It will take a few days from tracks to get repaired. What about the buses and roadways?"

"Sir, we have received reports of roads having been damaged as well. And bus drivers are refusing to comply with driving migrants across - they just aren't showing up to work.", replied Major Thomson.

"So the only way people can travel is on foot?"

"Yes - and nobody except the poor of the poor are doing that."

"This means that even though we've drawn the future map of India, the people aren't adhering to it."

"Yes, sir."

"Well then this is going to be a disaster for us. Our borders mean nothing if the people themselves don't divide each other based on religion!"

"Agreed, sir."

"We need to round up all the senior Indian politicians and leaders to force their people to migrate!"

"Sir, the leaders houses have been blockaded by the Samyukta Party, as you are aware - Bapu, Khansaab, Panditji, Zohrawar, Thakur, there are a 100 men outside each of their houses.", he replied.

"Get those men away from there then!"

"It's not easy - we can't just violently shrug them away. Those people there aren't of any of religion or creed - they're a mix, and some of them are armed as well. It will only be a loss of life on both sides."

Houndhatten sat back in his chair. "Do you think we've made a mistake in announcing the partition?"

Thomson shrugged. "I'm not sure, sir. It seemed like the right thing to do, with Khansaab having enough followers and people - but in the past few months people have really moved towards Jaidev Singh's ideologies."

"But where is Jaidev himself? We haven't heard from him in days now!"

"He'll show up when the time is right for him, as he always does. Until then, we can only wait."

By damaging key railway lines across India, the Samyukta Party had infused a fresh energy into the people, and the initial force with which people had been ordered to move was met with an equally resistive force. But it still needed a catalyst, and Jaidev knew the party alone couldn't achieve or sustain their desire for a unified India. They needed support from some, if not all, the power centres.

The royal families of India had been given a choice, over which side of the partition they wished to accede their kingdoms. They could accept India, Pakistan or have their kingdoms as independent nation states. But the heir of Rajputana, Sumer Singh, was a progressive, forward thinking man.

His kingdom bordered the to-be Pakistan, and he knew the turmoils that would present themselves once he had a potentially adversary state right next to his land.

Furthermore, he believed in a unified India, and the narrative of a divided land living in prosperity seemed improbable to him. That is why he had enlisted some of the Samyukta Party members within his local army, and the ideology had spread amongst the people. Rajputana kingdom was the first kingdom in India to offer its soldiers for a unified cause.

Over 10000 men were deployed across frontline in Rajasthan and Punjab, and the people who had set out to migrate were being sent back to their homeland.

“There will be no partition! Go back home!”, read the placards held by soldiers.

In many of the areas where people were being forced out by the dominant religion, these soldiers went lane by lane, street by street, and prevented people from being thrown out of the street. There were periods of violence and clashes, but the soldiers were much better equipped than ordinary rioters.

The British admonished Sumer Singh, but their power in India had waned - no longer could Britishers move around as freely, and neither were Indians willing to listen to their orders anymore. Sumer Singh set an example that other kingdoms followed - Maharaja Kishore Singh deployed troops along his borders, and the kingdoms of Tripura and Coochbehar provided their soldiers along the Bengal borders.

It was the first time kingdoms in India had united for a cause much greater than them, which was the formation of a country that had the potential to be great. And no kingdom wanted adversaries at their doorsteps, especially in a time when the concept of royalty itself was waning. The Maharajas wanted to be known as benevolent and just, and this was their way of showing it.

The critical point was when the Samyukta Party members destroyed the train tracks - they knew the movement was much bigger than they had initially expected - and offered their support.

It was only fitting that Jaidev's first public appearance was in Rajputana, after he fled Bombay. Under the full protection of Maharaja Sumer Singh, Jaidev gave his first public rally after three weeks - between which so much had changed in India.

The partition was signed into law, but people were not migrating - and were not being coerced into it either. Royal soldiers across India, and across religions, walked the streets, preventing chaos and maintaining order. Thousands of Samyukta Party members did the same, and during the month of July 1947, over 100,000 people joined the Samyukta Party.

The people had rejected the partition.

No matter what any political leader of the time said, or gave as a speech, the people did not want to be divided. Rallies of pro-partition leaders were ransacked by Samyukta Members, and such voices in the society were being quietened down.

By the end of July, it was clear that the British held no power in this land and would have to leave on any given day. Local politicians did not want to side with a fading light.

“This land, Bharat, is more than a few thousand years old. We have history ranging back to 3000 BC - and we must ensure we do not forget who we are, simply because of the atrocities of a few hundred years”, Jaidev spoke at the All India Radio, at a special transmission centre built for him in Jodhpur.

“Invaders have come to this land for hundreds of years - nowhere else have invaders attempted to rule a land as much as they have here, in this ancient kingdom and area we call Bharat. Why? Because this land has the best of the Earth. We must bring back the glory this land once held!”

All across India, millions heard Jaidev's address that evening.

The British did too.

By the first week of August, there was a calm on the streets of India that had not been seen for hundreds of years prior. No longer were British soldiers visible on the streets, and neither were rioters, and neither were any political leaders. People stayed home and awaited the inevitable.

And it arrived.

Lord Houndhatten was already under immense pressure from the British government, people, and Indian administration to declare India's self rule, and to leave the land once and for all - he had exhausted all resources, and the Davison line which demarcated India's division had become nothing but a drawing on a piece of paper.

Newspapers were printing headlines such as "Britain, leave today!", and "Is today the day?", as they awaited the British to officially leave.

Houndhatten announced a press conference on the 14th of August, and invited all reporters, journalists and scribes from local and national media houses in Delhi the next day. Everyone knew what was to be announced, but they wouldn't be certain until it was done. The British parliament had already given the assent for Indian independence in July, and it was only a matter of formally announcing it in India.

DEPARTURE AT LAST

It had become clear that the British decision on partition had not been accepted by the people. Indian political parties, for fear of antagonising their supporters, took a non-partition stand, taking a leaf from the popularity the Samyukta Party had achieved. "Akhand Bharat" was the slogan that was heard all around India. Thakur and Khansaab had both retreated from their previously firm stand on a demand for partition, realising that Hindus and Muslims did not want division of their homeland, and having seen the chaos and bloodshed that ensued during the Direct Action day, and even the previous partition of Bengal, they did not press on their demand for separate countries.

Instead, Lord Houndhatten, emerged at Rajghat on the 14th of August, 1947 - speech in hand, and hundreds of reporters keenly taking note. Thousands had gathered to hear what could be the final address of the British in India.

All leaders, Panditji, Bapu, Khansaab, Thakur, Jaidev, and dozens of other national leaders and royal families too were present. Houndhatten took the stage.

Dear India,

I come to stage today with a final official address that the nation of England would make to your esteemed country.

As has been demanded with full force by the powers of your country, that India must be independent, we would like to announce today that when the clock strikes midnight tonight, and the turn of a new day emerges, on the 15th of August, 1947, this country shall become fully independent.

The crowd roared upon hearing this. The British were leaving - and they weren't leaving months later, or even weeks - Independence was going to begin from tomorrow itself !

As we have seen in the months gone by, the demand for partition has ceased, and having taken due consideration of the loss of life and chaos that would ensue, we have rescinded the plan for the two-nation theory.

This land, from the Eastern ends of Manipur and Nagaland, to the western ends of Balochistan, to the northern ends of Baltistan and the southern ends of Kerala, is a singular nation named Bharat. We would transfer power to the All India Party, and our suggestion, is to hold elections at the earliest, to form a strong and stable government.

This is my final address to your nation.

And the crowd erupted.

Jaidev, who was present in the crowd with a hoard of followers, smiled and looked to the sky, taking a moment to breathe in the air of freedom as it bestowed upon him.

It was now time to build a great nation.

