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REPORT OF KOMAGATA MARU INVESTIGATION

Committee Brings Out Many Interesting Facts Concerning Expedition of Sikhs to Vancouver

The report of the Komagata Maru Committee of Inquiry, the findings of which formed the final chapter in the story of the futile attempt of 376 East Indians to enter Canada via Vancouver in May, 1914, has just come to hand, together with a copy of the Government of India's resolution on it. The report of the committee is a most exhaustive one, dealing with the matter from the time when Gurdit Singh arrived in Hong Kong to induce his fellow-countrymen to make an effort to defeat the immigration laws of Canada until the leader of the expedition made his escape with considerable money belonging to the ill-fated immigrants subsequent to the riot at Budge Budge as a result of which 26 were killed and 35 injured. The investigating committee consisted of Hon. Sir W. Vincent, president, Hon. Sir Bijoy Chand Mahtab, Hon. P. J. Fagan, Hon. Sardar Daljit Singh and Mr. H. Walmsley.

Held Twenty-seven Sitzings.

In order to obtain the evidence on which the report is based the committee held 27 sittings, examined 201 witnesses, visited the SS. Komagata Maru, and scene of the Budge Budge riot, and have scrutinized scores of documents which have thrown much light on the subject. The committee first went into the causes which led to the expedition to Canada and, in short, they found that the leader Gurdit Singh was the prime mover in the attempt to enter Canada. To the East Indians was painted a glowing picture of high wages and prosperity in Canada and they were induced to pool enough money to charter the Komagata Maru. The committee lays emphasis on the fact that Gurdit Singh was well aware that it would be necessary to fight the immigration authorities when reaching Canada, as he collected money from his prospective passengers before leaving Hong Kong. The report then traces the movements of the Japanese steamer from the time she left Hong Kong until she returned to Calcutta.

Regarding Gurdit Singh, the leader of the expedition, the report reads: "The only information we have regarding his previous character is that he was a native of the Amritsar district and a man of no great status there, although he owned a few acres of land. He emigrated from India some 25 or 30 years ago, and for some time carried on business as a contractor in Singapore and the Malay States. We are informed that in 1909 he returned to British India and was in 1912 before the criminal courts when he was bound over to keep the peace, but we have not been able to verify this statement. In 1913 he returned to Singapore. No satisfactory evidence has been produced before us as to his pecuniary position, but it does not appear that when he went to Hong Kong in January, 1914, he was possessed of any considerable wealth. He was, however, a person of strong character and succeeded in a short time in acquiring great influence over his fellow-countrymen in Hong Kong."

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the sufferings on the voyage, and the disputes as to food and the discovery of the worthless nature of the promises made by Gurdit Singh had engendered very bitter feelings against him. The facts, however, were that whatever the feelings of the passengers towards Gurdit Singh were when they first arrived at Vancouver, he had subsequently regained the whole of his influence over them. . . . This influence was further strengthened by Gurdit Singh's successful endeavors to obtain large sums of money out of the British consul at Kobe.

"When the Komagata Maru arrived at Calcutta, therefore, the Government officers, who had expected to find a large number of destitute passengers on board, the majority of whom were violently hostile to Gurdit Singh, found instead that he had at this time most of the passengers completely under his control; that many of them had been excited to a state of serious disaffection to the Government and as it turned out that a considerable number of them were armed and prepared to go to almost any length in their opposition to the authorities. It seems to us probable that if the real facts had been before the Government, the measures taken would have been of a different character but in the circumstances and having regard to the information of the local Government as to the position of affairs on the ship, we do not think we should be justified in coming to the conclusion that the measures taken were, save in one respect, unsuitable. It is every desirable for obvious reasons to avoid the use of force as far as possible, and the Government had every reason to hope and believe that, with a small body of police to assist, there would be no difficulty in inducing the emigrants to accept the arrangements made for them."

Gurdit's Close Adherents.

Frequent references are made by the committee to the close adherents of Gurdit Singh and they give the names of 13 of these. Of the number two have not been accounted for, one left the ship in Japan on the return voyage, two it is believed are dead, and the rest are prisoners in the Kalighat Gaol. Most of these men appear to be violent and dangerous characters and ready to go at any length in support of Gurdit Singh. On the other hand, the committee considers that the majority of the rest of the passengers are in themselves harmless. They do not justify their conduct at Budge Budge, as it is clear that a large number of them must have joined in the attack on the police, but the committee thinks that they are in many ways much to be pitied. The committee then deals with the cases of several individuals of the party of emigrants pointing out those who took a more active part in aiding Gurdit Singh in his attempt to defeat the Canadian emigration authorities.

Name No Witnesses.

In conclusion the committee points out that they have deliberately abstained from citing the source of evidence recorded in support of each of its findings it being in their estimation unnecessary. Moreover this evidence would cover 1000 pages of printed matter. "Finally," reads the report, "in many cases it would be most undesirable to publish the names of those from whom we have received information in the course of this inquiry. We also desire to make it clear that in respect of many of the points that have arisen for consideration in our investigation, the evidence before us has necessarily been very meagre. Indeed many of these points could not be fully elucidated without prolonged enquiries in China, Japan and Vancouver, and the opinion is expressed in this report that such points are only tentative and based on such information as we are able to obtain." Appended to the report which is in book form is a sketch of the scene of the riot at Budge Budge together with the names, ancestry and place of

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This story is a familiar one to citizens of Vancouver to whom the sight of the steamer lying at anchor in the inlet for many days became a veritable eyesore. The committee lays special emphasis on the fact that the Canadian Government supplied the East Indians generously with provisions while the litigation was in progress in the Vancouver courts. In all, the cost of these provisions was \$24,000 according to Gurdit Singh's own statement.

It is in connection with the riot at Budge Budge, as a consequence of which many lives were lost, that the committee makes the most thorough investigation. It found that the immediate cause of the attack by the Sikhs upon the police was the action taken by Supt. Eastwood to bring Gurdit Singh out of the crowd for an interview with Mr. Donald, a local district magistrate. It does not, however, charge Eastwood with provoking the attack. The East Indians were in an excited frame of mind and were probably full of the seditious doctrines which had been taught them on the journey. Further their tempers were not improved by a fruitless march of eight or ten miles. Eastwood's action in seeking out Gurdit Singh might have been misconstrued by the Sikhs as an attempt to arrest him and acting upon the impulse of the moment they charged the police. The committee found that the firing was begun by the Sikhs who were the only persons who had firearms at their disposal for immediate use. The death of Head Constable Mal Singh and Constable Sawan Singh was thoroughly investigated in view of the fact that two Indian witnesses swore that these officers were killed by a body of Fusiliers who fired at them when they were in charge of some Sikh prisoners near a railway station. The committee came to the conclusion that if these officers were shot by the Fusiliers it must have been accidental but that the probability was that Sawan Singh at least was shot by one of the Sikh rioters. In the case of Mal Singh it appears that he was mistaken for another East Indian and shot by the troops.

The committee scouts the suggestion that some of the rioters were killed by bayonets. The investigation proved that only one man was injured by a bayonet and his wound was a very slight one.

Government Justified.

The committee finds that the Government of Bengal was justified in having recourse to the provisions of the law and that in deciding to provide a special train for the passengers the Government was to a great extent actuated by charitable motives as it was believed that the returned Sikhs were in a destitute condition and should therefore be assisted in their journey to the Punjab. If allowed to journey to Calcutta they would have endangered the public peace. "As to the methods adopted for enforcing these measures there is perhaps more room for criticism but it is always easy to be wise after the event," reads the report. "It appears to us that the Government decided to adopt the measures actually taken partly owing to lack of information and more particularly from a misapprehension as to the real position of affairs on the ship. From information received at the time the vessel arrived in Vancouver the Government had been led to believe that there were two factions on board the ship, that the party opposed to Gurdit Singh was considerably stronger than that of his adherents. It was also believed that

very meagre. Indeed many of these points could not be fully elucidated without prolonged enquiries in China, Japan and Vancouver, and the opinion is expressed in this report that such points are only tentative and based on such information as we are able to obtain." Appended to the report which is in book form is a sketch of the scene of the riot at Budge Budge together with the names, ancestry and place of residence of all the passengers aboard the Komagata Maru.