

## Jalandhari Legend Bhagat Singh Bilga passes away



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A legend, Baba Bhagat Singh Bilga, the last surviving member of the pre-independence Ghadar (revolution) Party and a well-known freedom fighter, has passed away in Birmingham, according to information reaching the Desh Bhagat Yaadgar Memorial Committee at Jalandhar in Punjab. He was 102 years old.



The man former prime minister I K Gujral calls "a legend" was not a scholar or a man of many words. 102 years old Bhagat Singh Bilga was a revolutionary, the last survivor of the Gadar (revolution) Movement, a struggle launched by expatriate Punjabis in the US and Canada to overthrow the British in India.

Popularly known as 'Baba Bilga' and sharing his first name with legendary revolutionary Bhagat Singh, the freedom fighter passed away in a private hospital Thursday after battling prostate cancer.

His family members were with him when he breathed his last. He had gone to Britain some time back. He is survived by two sons, society members said.

Members of the Desh Bhagat Yaadgar Committee at Jalandhar city, mourned the passing away of the Ghadar Party leader and lauded his efforts in India's freedom struggle and social service.

Baba Bilga says that in his horoscope, April 1, 1907, is the date of birth. "But the officially registered birthday is April 2." Born in 1907, the same year when Bhagat Singh was born, Bilga was contemporary of

freedom fighters and Ghadar Party members Kartar Singh Sarabha and Mohan Singh Bakhna.

Baba Bilga was only one year old when his father passed away. He was brought up by his maternal uncle and grandmother.

He traveled from Calcutta (now Kolkata) to Rangoon (now Yangon), Singapore, Hong Kong and Argentina in search of jobs. He met Bhagat Singh's uncle Ajit Singh in Argentina. It was there that the seeds of fighting for his motherland were sown. He then spent his time mobilising Indians all over the world to be part of the freedom movement.

The Ghadar Party was founded in the United States and Canada by Indians in 1913 to help from there the freedom movement in India. It was founded by freedom fighter Lala Hardayal.

Baba Bilga became General Secretary of the Ghadar Party in Argentina. He had to go underground when he returned to Punjab. Baba Bilga played an important part in the Ghadar Party's activities.

*"I have seen corruption and poverty in this country since independence and I believe the youth should be given a chance to run the country. India of today breaks my heart," Baba Bilga had said in his last interview to The Indian Express on his birthday on April 1 this year.*

He was president of the Desh Bhagat Yadgar Hall (DBYH). He was also the man behind the famous Mela Ghadri Babeyan Da, which was first held 17 years ago. Author of five books, he had, with great effort, procured rare photographs of the Komagata Maru incident for the DBYH museum. Baba Bilga had never accepted any pension or favour from the government for his contribution to the freedom struggle.

We salutes real life heroes like Mr. Bhagat Singh Bilga. May his soul rest in peace.