

## Makhan Singh and the Ghadarites

Zarina Patel,  
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Most writings on the South Asian diaspora in East Africa emphasise the trade and commercial activities of the migrants who have been visiting, and settling, in these territories.<sup>87</sup>

However, though very much smaller in number, there were South Asians, especially during the colonial period who played a major political role. They spearheaded the anti-colonial struggle and helped to move it from limited ethnic confines into the national arena. As in the economic sphere, their impact on history far exceeded their numbers. One such Kenyan South Asian mobilised the workers and peasants and popularised the tenets of socialism. This was Makhan Singh, the founder of Kenya's trade union movement.

Makhan Singh was born in 1913 in what was then India. Gharjak, his birthplace, was a small village in the Punjab hinterland, then part of India; the area is now partitioned between India and Pakistan; his home village of Gharjak is now in Pakistan. He had a very modest family background. Sudh Singh Jabbal, Makhan Singh's father, was a carpenter belonging to the Ramgharia sect in the Sikh community.

### Asian Workers in Africa

Life in colonial India was not easy: Sudh Singh struggled to earn a living from carpentry, printing, religious service and even a stint in the army. The last secured him a pension of 20 rupees a month and with this meagre income, in 1920, he sailed on a dhow to Mombasa; leaving behind his wife, Isher Kaur, and his seven-year-old son, Makhan Singh.

Travelling to East Africa was not unknown; Sikh artisans had been recruited from the Punjab to work on the Uganda Railway and on completion, of the 37 747 labourers, 2 493 had died and 28 254 had returned to India. The 7 000 who stayed on were joined by their families, friends and compatriots. Prior to the railway project, Indians had settled largely in the coastal areas of East Africa. By 1921, the population of Indians in Kenya had reached 22 822 and amongst these some were acquaintances of Sudh Singh.

Sudh Singh signed a three-year contract as a carpenter with the Uganda Railway. His monthly salary was 55 rupees with a 50-rupee bonus, rations and travelling expenses both ways. Irked by colonial discrimination, the artisans banded together to form the Railway Artisans Union and Sudh Singh became its secretary. The authorities, however, did not take kindly to these developments. In 1923, three months prior to the termination of his contract, Sudh Singh was dismissed and the Union was closed down.

It was a period of increasing agitation in the country by Harry Thuku's East Africa Association (formed 1921) and the East African Indian National Congress (which spanned Kenya, Tanganyika, Uganda and Zanzibar, and held its first conference in 1914) led by its secretary, Manilal Desai, demanding basic rights, justice and equality. In the same year a White Paper entitled the "Devonshire Declaration" was promulgated in England stating that black African interests were paramount, negating the demands made by Kenya's Indians.

After a short visit to India, Sudh Singh returned to Kenya and undertook a series of jobs before settling down in Nairobi and starting a printing press. In 1927 he brought over his wife, Satwant Kaur, his 14-year old son, Makhan, and his daughter, Kulwant Kaur, to Nairobi.

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87 An earlier version of this paper was presented at "Eyes Across the Water: Navigating the Indian Ocean" conference, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, 20-23 August 2006.

## **Resistance Politics and Radicalism**

In the same year Jomo Kenyatta, then Johnstone Kamau, entered the public arena. The following year, in 1928, Isher Dass, a fiery Marxist originally from the Punjab, was brought to Kenya by Alibhai Mulla Jeevanjee, the founder of the East African Indian National Congress. 1927 also saw the resurgence of the Ghadar Party (see later).

Makhan Singh himself had lived his childhood in a very revolutionary period and region of India's history. He must have heard about the First War of Independence, the revolt of the Ghadarites, the Jalianwala Bagh Massacre and experienced the injustices of British colonialism. From a deeply religious father he had imbibed the humanitarian ideals of the Sikh gurus, and read about Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy and Lenin's socialist theories.

A series of circumstances had a major influence on Makhan Singh. He spent his childhood in India at a time when the movement for *swaraj* (independence) was gaining momentum. In 1917 his father may even have personally witnessed the Jallianwala Bagh massacre where a British regiment led by General Dyer killed 379 men, women and children and wounded scores more. Following this, a mighty wave against everything British swept the land and the demand for complete independence was raised. Mahatma Gandhi introduced his philosophy of non-violent struggle against the colonialists while the followers of Lenin and the October Revolution propounded their theories of *The Last Stage of Imperialism*.

The Punjab hosted the seat of British imperialism (Delhi) in South Asia: over the centuries the region had been invaded by Aryans, Greeks, Mughals and now the British. It was rich agriculturally and intellectually, and was the melting pot of several religions; Sikhism, Hinduism and Islam. Its very existence was replete with revolutionary fervour and Makhan Singh had partaken from it.

## **The Rise of the Ghadar Party**

Groups of Sikhs had migrated to North America at the turn of the century and settled in San Francisco and Vancouver. There, in 1913, they, together with some educated Hindus and Muslims, formed the Ghadar ("revolutionary") Party.<sup>88</sup> The Ghadarites established strong ties with the communists of the Soviet Union and had branches all over the world, including East Africa. Owing to their opposition to the British and consequent affinity to the Germans, they were severely victimised during the First World War. Hundreds were killed, imprisoned or exiled in the Punjab by the British rulers. In British East Africa the Ghadarites were charged with sedition – three were shot, two hanged, eight imprisoned and about 20 were deported to India. Two of them, L.M. Salve and Keshavlal Dwivedi, were founder members of the East African Indian National Congress.

The Ghadar Party was later revived in India and in 1926 part of it was renamed the *Kirti Kisan Sabha* (Workers and Peasants Party) and became formally allied with the Communist Party. Many Ghadarites continued to work and settle in Kenya and the country became an important staging post for members travelling between Moscow and Delhi. The Ghadarites, apart from other activities, had formed a poetry group (Kavey Phulwari) in Nairobi and Makhan Singh, by far the youngest of the group, used to accompany his father to their meetings. In Kenya the Ghadarites earned their living as artisans but did their political work underground; very little is known about them except for the few who later associated with Makhan Singh in his trade union activities.

It is evident that though India's interaction with East Africa is manifested mainly through trade, there has been a significant impact of political influence and input. It is the achievement of independence in India which gave a boost to other anti-colonial movements both directly and indirectly. Just one case illustrates the connection. Udham Singh who, in a London street, shot and killed Sir Michael O'Dwyer to avenge the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, had worked as a fitter in Nairobi. There were other such

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88 Patel, Z. 2006. *Unquiet: The Life and Times of Makhan Singh*. Nairobi: Zand Graphics/ African Books Collective.

connections and Makhan Singh was one of the key players who spearheaded the struggle for freedom up until the time he was detained.

### **Makhan Singh's Early Days in Kenya**

Makhan Singh was 14 years old when he arrived in Kenya. He enrolled in, and graduated from, the Duke of Gloucester School (now Jamhuri High School) in 1931. Though a brilliant student, the family could not afford to send him for further education so he joined his father's printing press. Makhan Singh was a serious and diligent young man who understood, and was opposed to, colonial as well as communal injustice both in Kenya and in India. Mixing with the workers in his father's press had made him keenly aware of the exploitative and inhuman conditions to which Kenyan workers were subjected.

### **Joining the Union Movement**

Influenced by his father's earlier trade union activities, Makhan Singh was drawn into union organising. From the time the Imperial British East Africa Company had arrived in Kenya, workers organisations and strike actions had been instituted by black Africans, Indians and even white Europeans. In 1935, artisans and workers from other trades made one more attempt at reviving the Indian Trade Union they had formed. Makhan Singh had attributed their past failures to the lack of proper organisation and, not surprisingly, was now requested to take up the post of secretary and be the full-time organiser. It was a task without remuneration yet Makhan Singh, at the age of 22, accepted it.

One of the first things he did was to change the name to the non-racial Labour Trade Union. Management committees now met regularly, minutes were recorded, correspondence was attended to and dues collected. The newspapers published Makhan Singh's letters and he kept the workers informed through hand-bills, pamphlets and public meetings. He wrote regular newsletters by hand and cyclostyled them for distribution. These were in Punjabi using the Gurmukhi script; the publicity material was in Urdu, Gujarati, Swahili and English. Later the languages included Gikuyu and Dholuo. The union went from strength to strength and when, in 1937, workers in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanganyika, became involved, the name was changed to the Labour Trade Union of East Africa.

The union fought for, and won, a raise in the wage structure and an improvement of working hours and conditions. These successes motivated black African workers who now began to join the Labour Trade Union of East Africa in large numbers. Some of the issues raised were:

- Do not work for low salary, work 8 hours a day, and be paid monthly, not by hours.
- Railway and Public Works Department workers are temporary, and should be made permanent.
- Congratulate press workers for establishing their own Union.
- Reduce school fees.
- Compensation should be paid by Government on injury at work.
- Appeal to all Kenyan workers to unite.

The handbill dated 31 October 1936 had a distinctly ideological content. It was addressed to "our worker comrades" and told them that the "struggle between capitalists and workers has started in earnest."<sup>89</sup>

### **Poetry, Unity and Politics**

Not only was Makhan Singh a good organiser and trade unionist, he was also an excellent communicator and understood well the needs of ensuring effective communications between trade unions and workers. It was largely his influence that shaped the successful strikes and publishing policies of the trade union movement in Kenya.

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<sup>89</sup> Shiraz, D. 2006. *Never Be Silent: Publishing and Imperialism in Kenya, 1884-1963*. London: Vita Books.

Though well versed in the Sikh religion, Makhan Singh refused to observe the ritualistic practices of the *gurdwaras* (Sikh temples). His poetic thoughts, written entirely in Punjabi, show a transition from admiration of the Sikh gurus and the values they espoused to concerns about untouchability, the oppression of women and Hindu-Muslim unity. Increasingly he focused on the exploitation of the workers by capitalists, the subject of imperialism and the need for workers, black African and Indian, to unite. He kept in touch with the on-going struggles in India and hence the vision of freedom was never far from his consciousness.<sup>90</sup>

Singh was well aware of the need for a political organisation to not only achieve broad political goals, but even to fulfil the objectives of the trade union movement. For this reason, he involved himself with the East African Indian National Congress. As a member of the executive and standing committees, he strove constantly to sensitise members about the plight of workers and to work towards closer cooperation between the unions, the East African Trades Union Congress, the Labour Trade Union of East Africa and the emergent black African nationalist organisations such as the Kikuyu Central Association, the North Kavirondo Central Association, the Taita Hills Association and the Ukamba Members Association.

### **The 1939 General Strike and After**

On Sunday, 23 July 1939, the Labour Trade Union of East Africa held its third annual conference on *Azad Maidan* (Freedom Ground) behind Desai Memorial Hall. One of its resolutions was a demand for workmen's compensation, 8-hour day, 45-hour week. Support from the Kikuyu Central Association and the enthusiasm of the black African workers acted as a catalyst with the result that an on-going strike by black African railway apprentices in Mombasa was electrified into what became popularly known as the Mombasa African Workers General Strike of 1939.

The government was alarmed and its report noted that the strike had been organised by Makhan Singh and the Kikuyu Central Association. The government's disapproval of trade unions in general and its hostility to Makhan Singh, the general secretary of the Labour Trade Union of East Africa, were unmistakable, and in the Legislative Council in January 1940, Major Grogan asked rhetorically if Makhan Singh could be imprisoned for subversive activities.

Meanwhile, on 28 December 1939, Makhan Singh had left for India; it was a trip he had planned for many months previously. The Second World War had commenced and trade union activities had, of necessity, to take a back seat. Makhan Singh and his Labour Trade Union of East Africa colleagues took a neutral stand in the war. Makhan Singh's overriding concern was the oppressed condition of the working-class. His lifelong struggle was to mobilise and organise workers, both in Kenya and in India, to liberate themselves.

Trade unionism appealed to the skilled and semi-skilled Indian workers, particularly in the building trades and on the railway.<sup>91</sup> However it was utopian to think that these workers who were better paid than black Africans, often solely on racial grounds, would back a truly multi-racial union. Makhan Singh was therefore a lone general unable to retain the loyalty of more than a section of the Indian working-class, and held at a certain distance by the black African militants in Nairobi who increasingly looked upon trade unionism as part of the black African nationalist struggle in which it was difficult for Indians to participate. The Kikuyu Central Association's support of the Union actually weakened the enthusiasm of some of the Indian members, many of whom preferred, for understandable reasons, to retain the racial terms of service which gave them better terms than it did the black Africans. The professional class in the East African Indian National Congress also held Makhan Singh at a distance.

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90 Makhan Singh Papers, University of Nairobi archives.

91 Clayton, A. and Savage, D. 1974. *Government and Labour in Kenya, 1895-1963*. London, pp. 210-214.

## **An Indian Interlude**

With all these various dynamics at play perhaps he needed time for reflection and an opportunity to share his concerns with comrades in India. It so happened that he did spend time with the comrades, but it was in rather unexpected circumstances. Makhan Singh was well aware of British displeasure so on landing in Bombay he disguised himself and travelled 500 kms north to a textile mill in Ahmedabad to work with the union there. But it was not long before the police located him and he was imprisoned without trial.

Makhan Singh remained in various jails until 1942 when he was restricted to his village in Gharjak. The restriction order was lifted in January 1945. Makhan Singh had met many like-minded comrades during his internment and sometime during this period, had joined the Communist Party. As one of his literary contributions he had translated chapters from Marx's *Das Kapital* into Punjabi, using the Gurumukhi script. After his release he involved himself with mobilising in the peasant movement.

August 1947 was the date for India's independence as well as the creation of Pakistan. In the new dispensation, Gharjak was ceded to Pakistan and Makhan Singh, together with his wife and her family, all crossed over to India. In spite of the entreaties of his comrades, Makhan Singh then decided to return to Kenya. His own words were: "One aim of my life, the freedom of India, has been achieved"; he felt he would be more useful here. He sailed back and celebrated India's independence on the high seas.

## **Post-War Militancy**

No sooner was he back than the immigration authorities served him with a Quit Order. He had in fact been declared a prohibited immigrant and his re-entry into the country had been an administrative slip-up. Makhan Singh's return to Kenya aroused the gravest apprehensions among the colonial authorities as they feared his popularity with the African masses and his ability to organise them. With his clear and unbending principles, he was a formidable and uncompromising adversary.

A series of civil court cases followed and Makhan Singh was acquitted on 21 December 1947. It was a rude home-coming but, undeterred, he plunged into the operative running of the Labour Trade Union of East Africa and the East African Indian National Congress, and took on additional tasks with the East Africa Students Federation and the Kenya Youth Conference. The next three years were the most intense and active period in Makhan Singh's life.

He developed a close association with the left-wing journalists of the *Daily Chronicle* and, apart from contributing articles, often anonymously, participated with some of them in a Marxist study group. In the East African Indian National Congress, he made strenuous efforts to inject a more hard-line anti-colonial and pro-African agenda. He strongly opposed, even going on a hunger strike, the communal franchise that was being introduced by the government for the Indian community; but without much success.

In October the government revived the deportation case which had not been resolved and Makhan Singh was arrested. This third phase of the litigation ended in Makhan Singh's favour, and he was released on 18 October 1948. Having won a major victory, Makhan Singh became more ambitious and in November applied for a certificate of Permanent Residence under the Immigration (Control) Regulations of 1948.

The government introduced an amendment to that bill in the Legislative Council, adding the proviso "if it is in the interests of the colony." All three readings were gone through the same night of 21 December 1948, and even before the bill was gazetted, it was published on 4 January, 1949. Makhan Singh's application dated 20 November 1948, for a certificate of permanent residence was rejected on the premise that "he was a person not born in this colony."

On the trade union front, the white Settlers, together with some employers and government officials from Legislative Council and the Labour ministry, were calling for "opposition to furtherance of trade unionism." What they were really afraid of was the part the trade unions had already played, and were now playing: intensifying not only the trade union struggles but also the nationalist movement.

The trade union movement was moving ahead in full force. In September 1948, the LTUEA had held a very successful conference on the cost of living and the wage structure. In another conference held in January 1949 Fred Kubai, the acting general secretary of the Transport and Allied Workers Union, proposed the formation of a permanent central organisation of trade unions to deal with problems common to all registered unions. Makhan Singh was appointed convenor. An important stage had been reached in the development of trade unionism in Kenya.<sup>92</sup>

In March, the government reacted by banning a number of left-wing periodicals from abroad e.g. the *Labour Monthly* of London, *New Africa* of New York, the *Guardian* of Cape Town and *People's Age* and *Blitz* of Bombay. Religious sects such as Elijah Masinde's "Dini ya Msambwa" and others were also banned. In the *Daily Chronicle* of 12 March, Makhan Singh wrote: "So, in the name of preventing the spread of Communism in Africa the drive against the workers and peasants movement goes on in Kenya."<sup>93</sup>

On Sunday, 1 May 1949, the East African Trades Union Congress was launched with Fred Kubai as its president and Makhan Singh as the general secretary. It lost no time in organising workers and agitating against unfair laws and practices. In the following year, the governor, Sir Philip Mitchell, in a lengthy speech at the Rotary Club of Nairobi, spoke of the "The New Tyranny," in reference to the menace of communism. He did however admit that there was no openly organised revolutionary party in Kenya, and no organised propagation of party ideology.

### **On Trial and in Internal Exile**

Meanwhile, on 30 March 1950, it was announced that Nairobi was to be raised to the status of "city." The East African Trades Union Congress called for a boycott of the celebrations and Makhan Singh declared: "there are two Nairobis – that of the rich and that of the poor. The status of the latter Nairobi has not changed and there is nothing for us to celebrate."<sup>94</sup> The Kenyan African Union, and its leader Jomo Kenyatta, were ambiguous in their support to the campaign and the boycott.<sup>95</sup> However, the degree to which the call for the boycott upset the settlers and their leaders is evident in this *Kenya Weekly News* editorial: "The simple fact is that there is no room for a Labour Department and for Makhan Singh in Kenya ... the continued tolerance of Makhan Singh's activities is a gross betrayal of the true interests of the Africans whom he seeks to deceive and to lead astray. It is high time that Kenya [were] rid of him and of others like him."

Though increasingly marginalised in the East African Indian National Congress, Singh's appeals for a united non-European front did finally materialise when the EATUC brought together, literally on one stage, the three major organisations representing the colonised people of Kenya. On Sunday 23 April 1950, the EATUC, the East African Indian National Congress and the Kenyan African Union jointly held a huge meeting of about 20 000 people in Kaloleni Social Hall under the chairmanship of the Honourable Eluid Mathu.

Towards the end of the meeting, Singh, seconded by Kubai, moved an addendum to a resolution. It demanded "the complete independence and sovereignty of the East African territories." This was the first time that such a radical and revolutionary idea had been publicly expressed. The die was cast.

On Monday, 15 May 1950, at 6.30 a.m., Fred Kubai and Makhan Singh were arrested at their respective homes in Pumwani and Park Road. News of the arrests spread like wildfire and a general strike was declared in Nairobi and other parts of Kenya. It lasted 10 days.

The rest is well-known.<sup>96</sup> After a stage-managed trial, Kubai was imprisoned and Makhan Singh was detained. Banished to the arid wastelands of Kenya's northern frontier district, Makhan Singh spent

92 Singh, M. 1969. *History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement to 1952*. Nairobi: East African Publishing House, chapter 16.

93 *Daily Chronicle*, 12 March 1949.

94 *Daily Chronicle*, 7 March 1950.

95 *East African Standard*, 6 March 1950.

96 See Singh, 1969, *History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement*, chapter 18 for a detailed narration.

eleven and a half years isolated from his colleagues and family. Several times the government offered to release him on condition that he leave Kenya never to return. Makhan Singh would not hear of it. He was constantly subjected to censorship whims and authoritarian orders; as one colonial District Commissioner said to him: "If we cannot prosecute you, at least we can persecute you."

Makhan Singh's phenomenal capacity for work, his singleness of purpose and his selfless dedication and commitment seemed to provide him with great inner strength. He read widely, made copious notes and was theoretically, well-grounded. Though a very private person, he was friendly and approachable and ever willing to share his knowledge and ideas with like-minded colleagues. Though a man of few words; he would passionately propagate and defend his ideas.

### **Release and Marginalisation**

Jomo Kenyatta was released on 14 August 1961 and Makhan Singh on 18 October 1961. In the intervening years, much had happened. The EATUC had been suppressed, the trade union movement had been reorganised by Fred Kubai, Aggrey Minya, Pio Gama Pinto, A.S. Rao, Pranlal Sheth, Bildad Kaggia, J.J.Simon, J.D. Kali and Kibara Kabutu. Kubai and Kaggia had taken over central control of the Kenyan African Union and co-ordinated Mau Mau activities in the city as well as in the reserves. A new central trade union organisation was formed in 1952, the Kenyan Federation of Registered Trade Unions which became the Kenya Federation of Labour in 1965: it was allied to the pro-USA International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) with Tom Mboya as its general-secretary.

A State of Emergency had been declared, and the Kapenguria Six had been arrested, tried and detained. Although the defence team for the Kapenguria Six included top-level lawyers – led by Denis Pritt who had successfully defended Ho Chi Minh in 1931-1932 against France – the men got seven years each. The supreme commander of the Mau Mau armed forces, Dedan Kimathi, was captured in 1956 and hanged in 1957. Along with large-scale counter-insurgency, this helped break the back of the rebellion.

But it had become patently clear to the British that a political settlement was the only viable solution to the insurgency. Hence in 1957 the first black African members of the legislature had been elected and Oginga Odinga, Tom Mboya and Daniel arap Moi had taken their seats. A succession of constitutions had followed, political parties had been formed and KANU had won the first general election. The East African Indian National Congress, which had lost its Muslim membership, was renamed the Kenya Indian Congress.

Makhan Singh was driven to his home on 22 October 1961 to a tumultuous welcome from wananchi and Asian, political and trade union activists. Replying to a journalist's question, Makhan Singh declared: "I am a communist". It was the ideology he had practised all his adult life and to which he remained faithful to the last.

As Britain prepared to hand over power to the Africans, the focus on fighting colonialism shifted to managing the logistics of an independent state. Ideologically, a two-line struggle ensued – pro-people, socialist-oriented versus neo-colonial, market-driven factions. MPs such as Pio Gama Pinto, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, Bildad Kaggia, Tom Okelo-Odongo and activists such as Ambu Patel, Pranlal Seth and Makhan Singh belonged to the socialist orientation and soon found themselves being side-lined. The Cold War took its toll.

Makhan Singh was denied any kind of public role, including any substantive position in the labour movement. He was not only ignored, he was harassed, baited and humiliated. He was expelled from the Printers and Kindred Trades Workers Union of which he was an official and became a victim of the anti-Asian hysteria which infected the newly independent state.

The post-independence ideological divide was reflected in the labour movement too. In 1965 the KANU government intervened and formed a Central Organisation for Trade Unions (COTU) bringing the unions under its control. In the face of such un-democratic and anti-people politics, Makhan Singh relinquished his aspiration to participate in the government of the day.

Instead he joined the Historical Association of Kenya and devoted the rest of his life to researching and writing the history of the Trade Union Movement. His two books, *History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement to 1952* and *1952-56 Crucial Years of Kenya Trade Unions* are, to date, the only record of this history and are thus in themselves a priceless legacy. He passed away in Nairobi on 18 May 1973 at the age of sixty, forgotten and unrecognised by the government of the day.

## **Conclusions**

Makhan Singh's independence of thought extended to organisational independence. Though he associated/communicated with national and international persons and organisations, he was adamant about maintaining the autonomy of Kenya's trade union movement. Though he described himself as a communist, he was not a member of any party (except briefly when he worked with the Communist Party of India), nor did he promulgate any dogma. He refused to affiliate the unions to any labour organisation, East or West, or subordinate them to any political party, and even when he used legal processes, he did not seek to make unions an arm of the state.

Whether such independence is feasible, when so much of our lives seem to depend on donor money, is debateable. However, it cannot be gainsaid that, in independent Kenya, the affiliation of COTU to KANU and its direct subordination to the government under Kenyatta and Moi regimes), seriously undermined COTU's primary mandate to serve its membership, the Kenyan working-class.

It is only in the new millennium and with the opening of the democratic space that COTU is beginning to re-define itself but clearly it has a long way to go before it can extricate itself from the grip of the extraneous forces it became embroiled with. Makhan Singh's most important legacy remains, of course, the trade union movement itself.

But perhaps of even greater significance for us in Africa today is the role model Makhan Singh left us. He had an exceptionally high degree of self-discipline and focus of purpose. He was resolute, ever hopeful and convinced of the rightness of his cause. In order never to be compromised, he structured his entire life-style and thinking so as to minimise dependency on material needs and personal considerations. He was a fearless humanist; totally devoid of religious, caste or racial bigotry, and a supporter of equal rights for women. Freedom and justice for the working-class was his *raison d'être*. His life informs us that such principle, commitment, honesty and sacrifice are not just utopian ideals but are possible, and, in fact, essential to revolutionary leadership.

In post-independent Kenya, pro-people and left-leaning ideologies persist but to date the translation into practice is glaringly absent. Makhan Singh, and his comrade Bildad Kaggia, were two patriots who were reviled, neglected and rejected by the very powers they had helped to put in place. Their crime was their resolute adherence to their principles and their absolute refusal to be compromised. Both men lived and died in conditions of personal suffering and deprivation but left a priceless legacy for generations to come. Our present-day leaders have much to learn from these heroes.

Mahatma Gandhi's vision endures in South Africa, Makhan Singh is another South Asian migrant whom history has yet to fully validate.