UPSC Mains practice – reference note

GS-I · 16-11-2026 · 15 marks · https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/upsc-mains-practice/2026-11-16-ghadar-movement-legacy

16 November marks the martyrdom of Kartar Singh Sarabha, hanged at Lahore in 1915 at the age of 19 in the first Lahore Conspiracy Case. "The Ghadar Movement failed as an uprising but succeeded as an idea." Critically examine this statement, bringing out the contribution and the limitations of the Ghadar Movement in India's freedom struggle. (15 marks, 250 words)

1. The news hook (16 November 2026)

- 16 November is observed as the martyrdom day of Kartar Singh Sarabha (born 24 May 1896, Sarabha village, Ludhiana), hanged at Lahore Central Jail in 1915 aged 19 after the first Lahore Conspiracy Case trial.
- He handled the Gurmukhi edition of the weekly *Ghadar*; Bhagat Singh regarded him as his hero and carried his photograph.

2. Key facts to quote

Fact	Detail
Formation	1913, on the US Pacific coast (began as the Hindi Association of the Pacific Coast); president Sohan Singh Bhakna, secretary Lala Har Dayal; HQ Yugantar Ashram, San Francisco
Paper	Weekly *Ghadar* from 1 November 1913 (Urdu, Gurmukhi and other editions)
Komagata Maru (1914)	Ship of Indian emigrants refused entry at Vancouver; on return, police firing at Budge Budge near Calcutta (September 1914) killed several passengers
February 1915 plan	Rising fixed for 21 February 1915; betrayed by the informer Kirpal Singh; arrests from 19 February; Rash Behari Bose escaped and later went to Japan
Singapore mutiny	15 February 1915 – the 5th Light Infantry rose; suppressed
Repression	Defence of India Act (March 1915); Lahore Conspiracy Case trials by special tribunals; hangings in November 1915
Tamil link	Chempakaraman Pillai worked with the Berlin (Indian Independence) Committee, which aided Ghadar plans during the First World War; the German cruiser Emden shelled Madras on 22 September 1914

3. Static links

- Revolutionary nationalism – first phase (Bengal, Maharashtra), Ghadar, Home Rule, HSRA (1928).
- Diaspora and race – Komagata Maru; Gandhiji's South African struggle.
- Repressive laws – Defence of India Act 1915 → Rowlatt Act 1919.

4. Previous-year questions (UPSC)

- Prelims 2014: "The Ghadr (Ghadar) was a: (a) revolutionary association of Indians with headquarters at San Francisco ..." – answer (a).
- No Mains GS-I question on the Ghadar Movement alone has been asked so far; related Mains questions are on revolutionary nationalism and the moderates (e.g. GS-I 2021, 15 marks).

5. Common mistakes

- Placing the Ghadar Party's headquarters in Berlin or Singapore – it was San Francisco.
- Calling Har Dayal the president – he was the secretary; Sohan Singh Bhakna was the president.
- Writing only the failure – the question asks for a critical examination of both halves.

Official sources

- The Tribune – When Baba Bhakna was saved from the gallows by Motilal Nehru (Ghadar Party history) – https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/when-baba-bhakna-was-saved-from-gallows-by-motilal-nehru-21098
- Scroll.in – The 1915 Ghadar plan to free India from the British was a failure, but it sparked a revolution – https://scroll.in/article/877029/the-1915-ghadar-plan-to-free-india-from-the-british-was-a-failure-but-it-sparked-a-revolution
- Encyclopaedia of Sikhism (Punjabi University, Patiala) – Kartar Singh Sarabha (1896–1915) – https://eos.learnpunjabi.org/KARTAR%20SINGH%20SARABHA%20(1896-1915).html

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